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A HIDDEN FOE.

CHAPTER I.

It is an early November day in the year 1862, in Bath. Fine rain is falling and leaden clouds hang low in the valley. A dull, murky depressing day anywhere, but more so in Bath than elsewhere. Given fine weather and a bright sun, and Bath is almost worthy of the praises that have been bestowed upon it. Seen from the railway on the other side of the valley its aspect is stately, with its terraces climbing the hill one upon another, its many patches of green foliage, its stately monotony of stone ; but viewed beneath a leaden sky, with a drizzling rain falling uninterruptedly, Bath is the most depressing of towns. Proud of being the only city in England constructed solely of stone, Bath has been content, save in its crescents and squares, to dispense with all architectural adornments ; its streets convey the impression that the houses were built in a solid wall, and the windows and doors were then cut out as with a knife, so bare, so dreary, so monotonous is their appearance.

White as it is when first brought from the quarry, Bath stone is a greedy absorbent of dirt and soot. The houses facing south and southwest are exposed to the rains that fall so frequently that it would almost seem as if Nature spent herself in the vain endeavor to wash the city white, and retain something of the grey hue of the stone ; but the streets facing north are as black as if a mixture of soot and water had been rubbed into them ; while those looking east and west are banded with alternate stripes of black

and grey such as Londoners are familiar with in the lower portion of St. Paul's. But Bath is proud of its grimy blackness, and there are ordinances forbidding the scraping or painting of the houses. So impressed are the inhabitants with the idea that external dirt is an evidence of internal respectability that they make no effort to brighten the houses by window decorations, and nowhere else are dingy blinds the rule and clean blinds the exception as at Bath.

The monotony of the streets is unbroken by bay or bow window or other projections, all is flat, regular, bare and ugly. Even the crescents and terraces, which are the pride of Bath, are monotonous in the regularity of their style and frippery of the architectural decorations, and these are in most cases fast beginning to crumble away and to fall in sooty fragments.

But on a fine day, when it gets one, and beneath a bright sun, Bath, with its broad and well paved streets, its handsome shops and its stately stone work, is a city to be admired ; seen on such a day as that in question it is inexpressibly dull and dreary.

The band was playing in the pump room to a scanty audience. The bathing attendants were idle, for the gouty and rheumatic dared not venture out on a day like this, the streets were wellnigh deserted, the black fronts glistened with the wet, and the horses sent up clouds of steam as they struggled with their loads up the sharp ascent. Those pedestrians whom business compelled to be abroad hurried along under their dripping umbrellas. It was getting dusk now, and anyone passing down Royal Crescent who chanced to look up would have noticed the glow of a bright fire in the drawing-room of No. 100. A lady was sitting there alone looking into the fire, and indeed there was no temptation to look outside, the great meaningless columns between each house—columns which support nothing and whose sole object appears to be to limit the view of the inhabitants—confined the prospect to the garden in front, and to the tops of the leafless trees in the park below, beyond this the falling rain and the thickening gloom shut in the prospect.

Mrs. Clitheroe, the lady gazing into the fire, was a woman of some forty-five years of age. Her figure was well formed, and would have been stately had it not been

for its stiffness and the absence of grace in her curves. She was sitting there bolt upright, although in an easy chair, and indeed no one had ever seen her in a more comfortable posture. Her hair was light and still untouched by age, her eyebrows were thin but regular, her eyes were cold grey, her lips thin and firmly set together, her nose well formed and straight. Mrs. Clitheroe was a leader of society in Bath and was a power there ; a woman who was respected rather than liked, and who owed her position as much to her own determined will and character as to the fact that she belonged to one of the oldest families of the county.

A leading doctor of the place had summed up her character to a small party of intimate friends, " I would rather have Mrs. Clitheroe as a friend than as an enemy, for if she took a dislike to one she would never rest until she had driven him out of the town. I should call her a clever woman, as well as a determined one. I suppose she has never had any particular reason for going out of the beaten path, but if she had any object to gain I would back her to attain it by any means, and should be sorry to be the man who stood in her path. I find her interesting as a study of character, but I would not marry her for the wealth of the Indies." And this appreciation of Mrs. Clitheroe's character was recognized by those who heard it to be a true one.

The note which Mrs. Clitheroe twisted round her finger as she sat looking at the fire was a short one. " My dear Augusta,—I want to have a talk with you. Will you drive over at three o'clock to-morrow? We can talk here more comfortably than at your place, where callers come in every five minutes.—Your affectionate brother, ALGERNON." Not a note such as would be thought likely to cause uneasiness, and yet it had made Mrs. Clitheroe thoughtful. What could Algernon want to speak to her about? Had he heard that Philip and she were living beyond their income? No, it could not be that. In the first place the excess was but a small one, and had it been large she knew Algernon well enough to be certain that he would not trouble himself to give any advice or opinion on her affairs unless specially asked for it. Besides, it would not be necessary to have a long conversation on such a topic. It was she who all her life had been the adviser, if advice were necessary, and

she still retained the habit of the elder sister. If it were not that what could it be?

Mrs. Clitheroe's private opinion of her brother had always been that he was rather a poor creature. As far as Bath was concerned he was socially a success. The Corbyn estate was well kept up, and he held his proper place in the county. If he had married, and married well, as he might have done, he might have added another estate to Corbyn, and become one of the first landowners of the county, but he had never evinced the smallest inclination towards marriage. This had at one time been a very sore subject with her until, as time went on, the advantage to her son Philip, should Algernon always remain single, overpowered the feeling of regret that the old name of Corbyn, which had for so many centuries held its own in that part of Somersetshire, should become extinct.

Why Algernon should remain single was a question over which she had puzzled for many years. To marry was the natural thing for a man in his position to do; it was, indeed, almost a duty. So long as his father was alive she could understand his remaining single, but not afterwards. Rumor had never even once coupled his name with that of any lady. He had never shown the slightest preference for one over another, and his sister had once said, in a moment of irritation to her husband, "I believe Algernon does not marry because he likes himself so much that he has no liking to spare for anyone else." The thought had occasionally crossed her mind that he might in his younger days, when away from home, have got into some entanglement, have had some love affair, of which his friends knew nothing, and a year or two after his father's death she would not have been altogether surprised had Algernon at any time announced to her his intention of marrying some stranger of whom she had never heard. But that was ten years ago. Algernon was forty now, and, as everyone agreed, not a marrying man, and the succession of Corbyn Court to Philip Clitheroe seemed assured. Still, as she sat there, the thought of the possibility of such an event as his marrying came afresh into her mind. What she had wished for fifteen years ago would be intolerable now.

"It would be nothing short of a cruel wrong to Philip," she said to herself; "but no, it can never be that; Algernon loves his own way and his own ease too much to risk

putting himself out by marrying, besides, if he had the least fancy for one woman more than another I must have noticed it, for I know everyone he does, and he is at Bath every day. Still, I cannot understand this note; he drops in here two or three times a week. What can he have to say that is so important that he should arrange for a special meeting in this way?"

However, as the question would be solved next day, Mrs. Clitheroe at last gave up puzzling over it, and rousing herself began to dress for dinner.

The next afternoon she drove over to Corbyn Court. Her brother was in what he called his study, and there for an hour they were closeted together. Mr. Corbyn had much to say, and although it was seldom that he was inclined to admit that he could even possibly be wrong, his tone was apologetic, and he concluded his relation, to which his sister had listened in stern silence, with the admission, "I own that it was weak."

"Weak! Weak is no word for it," Mrs. Clitheroe exclaimed, in a tone of bitter indignation. "I consider, Algernon, that you have behaved infamously. I could not have believed it of you. That a Corbyn of Corbyn Court should fall in love with a schoolmaster's daughter is astounding; that he should stoop so low as to marry her is contemptible; that he should so act as to lead my son to believe that he should be his heir is infamous."

Algernon Corbyn made no reply to this passionate outburst. He had in fact expected it when he made his communication; and indeed it was in no small degree due to the fact that he knew how it would be received by his sister that he had so long abstained from making it. The leading traits in his character were a feeling of pride in his family, for the Corbyns of Corbyn Court had for centuries been magnates in that part of Somersetshire, and a shrinking from trouble or unpleasantness of any kind. He was a kind and liberal landlord; not so much because he really interested himself in the welfare of his tenants as because it was so much easier to say yes, than no, when a remission of rent was asked for on the ground of failure of crops or hardness of times.

He was a fair man; rather above the middle height. His manner was easy and gentle, but with a certain touch of haughtiness that impressed upon those whom he ad-

dressed that it was Corbyn of Corbyn Court who was speaking. He was very popular in the county; open-handed in his subscriptions to all the local charities and institutions, and a personage of the first consequence in Bath. Had he chosen to stand in Parliament for that city everyone said that it would be a walk over for him, but he had no ambition that way, or indeed any other way that gave him trouble, and was seldom seen on the bench of Magistrates, and not very often at the Hunt. As one of the younger men at the Club remarked, "Corbyn only needs one thing to be a capital fellow—he wants to be more of a man," and although the remark was considered as an impertinent one when applied to Corbyn of Corbyn Court, it was generally felt that it was not far from the mark.

Mrs. Clitheroe differed much from her brother, the sole point of resemblance between them being their pride in the family. With him this took a passive form; in her it was dominant and assertive. Her brother felt that her anger was not unreasonable, and from long experience he knew that in such a case it was best to take refuge in silence, but upon this occasion he was not allowed to shield himself thus.

"What have you to say?" she went on. "You must have something to say. I suppose it is a thing you have been thinking over for years?"

Philip is comfortably provided for," he said.

"Philip will have enough to live on. He will not be a pauper, though the Clitheroe estates are not what they need to be; but I should never have built on his succeeding to Corbyn if it had not been for your own conduct. Have I not urged you scores and scores of times to marry? I wanted to see a Corbyn succeed you, as son has succeeded father for so long. It was only when it seemed evident that you were determined to die a bachelor that I began to look to see Philip come after you and unite the two estates in one. I am ashamed of you, Algernon, ashamed as well as angry. If I had been fool enough to suffer myself to be caught by a pretty face, and to have made a low marriage like this, I would have had the courage to face it. At any rate when our father died, which is fourteen years ago now, when this child must have been three years old, you had the opportunity of doing then

what you were afraid to do before, and to bring her home and acknowledge her if you ever intended to do so. The county might have thought you a fool, but knowing how proud our father was of the old name they would have made excuses for you. But what can they say of you now when they hear? I am sure I do not know what they will say of you. I would rather you had committed a crime that had something manly in it than have gone on playing a mean cowardly part as you have done."

"I think you have said enough and more than enough, Augusta," Algernon Corbyn said angrily. "I have put up with a good deal from you from the time I was a boy, but this is too much altogether. I am not going to listen to any more talk of this sort."

"You may not choose to listen to it, Algernon," his sister said, rising, "but what I say all the county will be saying as soon as they hear the news. Though they may not choose to say it to your face they will say you have behaved like a hypocrite and a coward, and that you have behaved badly to Philip, that you have behaved badly to this girl, that you have behaved badly to everyone."

"At any rate," Mr. Corbyn said, "I expect that you will say nothing of this matter at present, Augusta. I have told it to you in strict confidence, and it will be time enough for you to ventilate your opinion on the subject when I return with my daughter."

"You do not suppose," she said scornfully, "that I shall be in any hurry to proclaim from the housetop that a Corbyn has disgraced himself—that is not my way. I may tell you my opinion myself, but when the time comes I shall probably fight your battle a good deal more effectually than you will fight it yourself. You do not suppose I shall let everyone see how disappointed I am that Philip is not to inherit Corbyn."

So saying, without another word, Mrs. Clitheroe left the room, and taking her seat in her carriage with the single word "home," thought over the unexpected and unpleasant news that she had just heard. It was a bitter disappointment to her, it was shocking that her brother should have acted a mean and cowardly part, and that a Corbyn should become the talk of the county. It was a bitter disappointment that Philip should be ousted from his position of heir of Corbyn. The Clitheroe property was not

a large one. Her own expenses were considerable, and for years now Philip had been taught to consider himself as his uncle's heir. He had kept two or three good hunters, had traveled for some months every year, and had spent money freely, and on the strength of the expectations his mother had never stinted him, and there was already more than one mortgage on the Clitheroe estates.

"Should she tell him at once?" This was the question that she kept turning over in her mind as she drove homeward; but she finally decided not to do so. "He will hear it all in time," she concluded, "and it will not be such a great blow to him as it is to me. He has his father's easy-going disposition and will take it quietly; as likely as not he will make a joke of it, and say it is a good thing that there is to be a mistress at Corbyn at last. It is a pity he has not a little more of my spirit, he is a Clitheroe all over."

That was indeed the general opinion. Philip Clitheroe had taken after his father, who was one of the most popular men in the county, a genial, kindly, hard-riding squire, altogether without ambition and without prejudices; an easy-going landlord and a generous friend who would have found it very hard to have made his income meet his expenditure had it not been that his wife was a good manager.

Philip Clitheroe met his mother at the door.

"You have got one of you headaches, mother, I can see that at once," he said, "you had better go and lie down. You know we have got some people coming to dinner. If you do not feel equal to it I will drive round at once and put them all off."

"My head is not very bad, Phil, and a couple of hours rest will do me good. I have no doubt that I shall be able to take my place at the table."

Philip Clitheroe went down to the club and played whist until it was time to return to dress for dinner. He had heard on coming downstairs that his mother was already in the drawing-room. "Are you better now, mother?"

"Much better, Phil;" and, indeed, although Mrs. Clitheroe was always an excellent hostess, her guests that evening were unanimously of opinion that they had never known her in brighter or better spirits.

"She is a very charming woman," old General Humphreys said to his wife as they drove home. "There are

some people who do not like her, but, for my part, I think she is an uncommonly pleasant woman. I only wonder she did not put Philip in the Army. It is a bad thing for a young fellow having nothing to do, especially in a place like this. He would have made a first-rate soldier, and it would have kept him out of extravagance. However, I suppose he will come in for Corbyn some day ; but I have heard men who know what the Clitheroe property is worth, wonder how they do it all on its income."

Mr. Corbyn's reflections after his sister had left him were not pleasant. He regretted now that he had not, as she said, taken the step of proclaiming his marriage when, at his father's death, he came into the property. People, of course, would have talked ; but they would not have talked as much then as they would now. He had certainly been foolish, and Augusta had perhaps a right to feel aggrieved about Phil. However, he did not think that Phil would himself take it to heart. Still, no doubt people in general would see the thing in the same light as Augusta had done, and would blame him more than they would have done had he come forward and produced Constance at the first opportunity. He had always meant to do so before long, and had been putting it off for years. But the girl was seventeen now, and if it was ever to be done, this was the time for it.

Seventeen years ! It did not seem as long as that from the day when, feeling an utterly broken-hearted man, he had laid her mother in her grave in the churchyard of St. Malo, and leaving her week-old infant in the charge of the people with whom they had lodged, hurried away from the scene of his loss. No doubt it had been a terrible mistake altogether, and yet even now he could hardly blame himself. He thought over those happy stolen meetings with Constance Purcell, of the long pleading before she consented to marry him without his father's consent, and of the year of perfect happiness he had spent with her wandering about the continent, until two months before her death they had settled down in the house on the hill looking down upon St. Malo.

So far everything had turned out well. No suspicion had ever entered his father's mind. They had been fortunate in scarcely ever falling upon anyone who knew him at home, for they had kept away from the beaten path of

tourists, visiting the larger cities only at a time when the annual British exodus had come to an end. His father had, indeed, written grumbling letters occasionally at his son's long absence, but had been well enough content to hear from him that he was thoroughly enjoying his travels abroad. No one had ever connected the disappearance of Constance Purcell with him. He had been careful and cautious. Their intimacy had never been suspected.

He had left home a week before she started to join him at the spot where he had arranged everything for their marriage, and her father and mother had no clue whatever to guide them in their search for her.

At the time he left his baby-girl in the charge of the people in whose house she was born, Algernon Corbyn had no idea of leaving her long with them. He had formed no plans when he left, his sole idea then had been to get away from the scene of his loss. He had a feeling of aversion rather than of love to the helpless infant whose coming had been the cause of its mother's death, and after arranging for the payment of a monthly sum that amply satisfied those to whom he entrusted it he had hurried away, stayed for a week in London, and then gone home, where his father was much discontented to find that, after his long rambles on the Continent, he had returned depressed and in low spirits.

From this, however, he was not long in rallying, for Algernon Corbyn was a thoroughly selfish man, and he came in time to recognize the fact that the death of his wife had saved him from much trouble and inconvenience. He could not have extended his absence from home much longer, and then must at last have come the inevitable scene with his father, for his wife, although she had yielded to his prayer that their marriage should for a time be kept secret, was naturally fearless and high-spirited, and would never have consented to an indefinite postponement of the announcement of their marriage. As to the child, there was plenty of time for that ; at any rate at his father's death he would produce her. Her existence was a source of annoyance rather than a pleasure for him. He could not very well marry again so long as her existence was kept a secret, for to do so would be to lead to endless troubles and annoyances afterwards, and he therefore turned a deaf ear to his father's suggestions that it was getting high time he should think of taking a wife.

When, three years after the birth of the child, his father died, he fully intended to carry out his intention to bring home the child and announce his marriage, but he had put it off from time to time. He shrank from the gossip and talk that the announcement would cause. Now that he was master of Corbyn Court, and was no longer under the influence of love, he was ashamed of the mesalliance he had made, and perhaps most of all he shrank from the bitter tongue of his sister. After all there was plenty of time. The child was comfortable and happy now, but she would be a great nuisance at the Court. She might, therefore, just as well remain for a bit where she was; and so years went on and Constance Corbyn grew up at St. Malo.

From time to time, at long intervals, he went over to see her, and it was after his last visit a few months before that he had come to the decision it was time he should bring her home. He was influenced in this decision by finding that she had since his previous visit grown from a somewhat gawky and unformed girl into a very pretty young woman, exceedingly like what her mother had been before her. He had paid liberally, and she had had the best masters St. Malo afforded. She carried herself well, with a pretty imperious turn of the head, and he felt that the Court need not be ashamed of her personally, and that her appearance would go far to make his position easier than it otherwise would have been. All the mothers with sons of a marriageable age would be on his side, although of course he should have a very unpleasant time at Augusta. Things would not be so bad after all; at any rate the thing had to be done some time, and no time could be better than the present.

Therefore, after seasons of irresolution, he finally mustered up courage to take the final step, and resolved to get the worst of it over by breaking the matter to his sister. The result had been exactly what he had expected. Augusta had been exceedingly angry and exceedingly rude, but he knew enough of her to feel sure that when the affair became known and talked of she would be his most zealous ally. In the first place she would consider it necessary to support him for the sake of the family, and in the next, she would not for worlds allow anyone to suppose that she was disappointed at Philip having been ousted in his position as heir of Corbyn Court.

"She may scold," he said to himself, "but I can rely upon Augusta. If there had been anything to be done she would have fought tooth and nail against it. She has any amount of pluck, and what with her pride and her love of Phil, she would not have stuck at anything if she could have staved this off; however, now that she must see that she can do nothing, she will put a smiling face on it, and will go about hinting that, of course, she knew it all the time, and thought, upon all accounts, it would be much better that the matter should be kept quiet until the dear girl was of an age to take her place at the head of the Court. Yes, she is a remarkable woman, but I am heartily glad she is my sister and lives at Bath, instead of being my wife and living here.

"As to Philip, I am sure that he will take it well; of course, it is rather hard for him, and I will put him down in my will for a round sum that will clear him off and give him a fresh start, but, naturally, he must draw in his horns a little. I wonder whether Augusta will tell him this evening; of course, she will understand that though she was to keep it a secret for the present, she could tell Philip, if she liked. If she does, no doubt he will be up here in the morning."

But Philip Clitheroe did not make his appearance at the Court next day, and Mr. Corbyn understood that his sister for some reason or other had kept the secret to herself. "It is just like her. She thinks perhaps I may change my mind; but she is mistaken if she does. I will start to-morrow morning. When I get to town I will hand over to Ferris the certificates of marriage and baptism and tell him the story. It is just as well that he should have the documents in his possession. Then I will cross in the morning by Calais and on to Paris, stop there a day or two and then go down to St. Malo." He touched the bell. "Haxell, pack my portmanteau to-night, I shall be away ten days or a fortnight. Order the dogcart to be here in time to catch the twelve o'clock up train."

Now that the die was cast Mr. Corbyn was in high good temper; he had got over the most unpleasant part of the business, and the rest seemed easy and more pleasant. He chuckled over the astonishment that would be created among his friends by the announcement, and of the sensation that would be made, when he introduced Constance

at the first ball. It was now the 6th of November and the Bath season had fairly commenced. He would have her home before Christmas and give a ball himself and introduce her. Of course, it would be more pleasant if her people had been well born, but there was after all no absolute necessity that the facts in this respect should be known. He need merely say that he had been married many years before, and that his wife had died in her first confinement. Nobody would have a right to ask questions on the subject. Ferris would have all the documents and proofs, and Phil and his mother would be the only two who would in any case be entitled to ask the family lawyer questions, so that no one really need know that Constance's mother was not a lady. His father's character was pretty well known, the mere fact that he had thought it advisable to keep his marriage a secret from him would not go far to show that there was anything to be ashamed of in it. So in the afternoon Mr. Corbyn went down to the Club, played a rubber two and was in excellent spirits. Driving back up the long hill to Lansdown, he leaned forward and spoke to the coachman.

"It is very cold this evening, Brandon."

"Very cold, sir, I should say by the look of the stars it is going to be a hard frost to-night."

Indeed, by the time that they reached the top of the hill, and the horses broke into a trot again, the sharp sound of their hoofs showed that the frost had begun, and the road, which had that afternoon been soft and muddy, was already frozen. It was a bleak drive across the high ground, past the racecourse and on until they again began to descend into a dip. Another mile and a half and they reached Corbyn Court.

The next morning the ground was like iron, it had frozen hard all night, and the thermometer was down at twenty. Mr. Corbyn was rather late in starting; he had several letters to write, and matters that had better be arranged before he went away for a fortnight's absence. The last thing he did was to go to an iron safe where leases and papers of importance were kept. From an inner drawer in this he took out an envelope containing some papers, glanced through them to see that they were all correct, and placed them in the breast pocket of his coat. Then he put on his wraps, went out, and took

his seat in the dog-cart. He looked at his watch as he started.

"We have run it rather close, Brandon ; it is a quarter past eleven already."

"We shall do it, sir ; it is good going this morning ; and we shall be there with five minutes to spare. Captain has done it under forty minutes before now."

Mr. Corbyn looked at his watch once or twice, and found that Captain was doing his best, and that there was no fear of being behind his time. Once arrived at the top of the long hill, Brandon applied the brake, for the hills are so steep round Bath that even two-wheeled vehicles are often provided with brakes, and the trap proceeded with scarcely abated speed. The coachman checked him somewhat when they got fairly into the upper part of the town, for the road here was paved with flat stones, and it needed some care. Several vehicles were zigzagging up the hill with their drivers shouting and encouraging the horses, others were standing stationary, while the steaming and exhausted animals recovered their wind for a fresh effort to climb the cruel ascent.

How it happened was never exactly known, Brandon always maintained that he had the horse well in hand, but that he must have slipped on an ice-covered stone. There was a sharp exclamation, Captain fell almost on to his head, and the two occupants of the dog-cart were sent flying through the air. Brandon went straight over the horse's head, and lay stunned in the middle of the road. Mr. Corbyn flew rather to the left, and his head came against one of the stone steps leading from the raised footpath in front of Belmont into the road.

CHAPTER II.

A CROWD quickly gathered round the fallen men and horse, and a policeman who was standing at the corner of the York Hotel ran up the hill to the spot, lifted the coachman into a sitting position, just as a gentleman who had seen the accident came out from one of the houses in Oxford-row with a jug of water. The policeman saw that the could be of no assistance here, and pushed through the crowd gathered round the other fallen man. They had turned him over, and one of them kneeling by his side was supporting his head.

"Why, it is Mr. Corbyn!" the policeman exclaimed.

"I am afraid it is all over with him," the man who was supporting Mr. Corbyn's head said, looking up. "He came with his head right against those steps."

"He is breathing," the policeman said leaning down over him.

At this moment a gentleman pushed through the crowd, saying, "Make way, please, I am a doctor." A moment's examination sufficed to enable him to form an opinion. "A terrible fracture of the skull. There is not the slightest hope of his surviving it."

"It is Mr. Corbyn, sir," the policeman remarked in awed tones, for that such an accident should befall Mr. Corbyn of Corbyn Court, one of the magistrates of the county, seemed terrible indeed to him.

"Yes, I know him," the doctor replied. "Let me think. His sister, Mrs. Clitheroe, lives in Royal Crescent."

"Yes, sir, I know the house," the policeman said.

"He had better be carried there. Send down to the Police Station for four men and a stretcher. Now, how about the other?" and he went to examine the coachman. He was still lying insensible.

"I think he is only stunned," the doctor said, after examining him. "Of course, there may be concussion of the brain, but that I cannot tell at present. He had better be carried down to the hospital at once."

By this time two more policemen had come up ; these with some difficulty cleared the road of the crowd, cut the traces and got the horse on to his legs, removed the shattered dog-cart out of the way of the traffic, and placed the two portmanteaus, which had also flown out into the road, beside it. In a few minutes the men arrived with two stretchers. The doctor had already proceeded to the Crescent to break the news to Mrs. Clitheroe.

The shock was a great one. Algernon was her only brother, and although she had always inwardly lamented that he did not come up to her ideal of what a Corbyn should be, she had yet never had any serious difference with him from his boyhood until that which had occurred the previous day. All Mrs. Clitheroe's affections were centered in her son. It was for his sake she had been so deeply angered the day before when she heard that another stood between him and Corbyn Court. Nevertheless the sudden news of the death of her brother came as a terrible shock to her, and was heightened by the fact that they parted in anger, for by the time that Algernon was carried to the house in Royal Crescent, the faint flicker of life which had remained had died out, and it was a corpse that was carried into the room upstairs. Ten minutes later Philip arrived breathless, the news having reached him at the club.

"This is an awful shock, mother," he said as he entered the room in which she was sitting, "it must be terrible for you. I could scarce believe it when Dr. Vesey came into the club and told me. I am awfully so rry for uncle, it seems he was on his way to the station, for he had his portmanteaus with him ; they have brought them here and put them in the hall. I suppose he was a little late, and was driving fast to catch the train. It is a beastly hill, and on a sharp day like this as slippery as glass."

"I had not heard that he was on his way up to town," Mrs. Clitheroe said, rousing herself suddenly.

"He must have been, mother, and I suppose he was going for some little time as he had two portmanteaus with him. I know when he runs up for a day or two he only takes one, for I have gone up with him half a dozen times."

Up to this point Mrs. Clitheroe had scarcely thought coherently, her mind had seemed numbed with the suddenness of the shock. Algernon was dead, had been killed

close to her door, they had taken him upstairs. This she had repeated over and over again to herself in a dull mechanical sort of way, but Philip's words turned her thoughts into a fresh channel. Algernon had said he meant to act at once, but that with him seldom meant much, and she had reckoned upon a fortnight or three weeks delay before he set out to fetch this daughter of his. But for once he had evidently roused himself to carry out his intention, when he had been stricken down, and was on his way to France to produce the girl who was to rob Philip of his inheritance.

Her brain was actively at work now. What would be the effect of this accident? Did this girl know that she was the heiress of Corbyn Court? Did anyone know save Algernon? If not—and at this point Philip put his hand on her shoulder.

"The shock has been too much for you, mother; you had best lie down for a little time. Have you seen him?"

She shook her head. "Dr. Vesey was within," she said, speaking for the first time, "he went out when they brought him in, and came back, and said that it was all over. He made me go into the dining-room, as he said it was better that I should not see him at present."

"Much better I should say, mother. It can do no good, and it will be a terrible sight for you. Later on you can see him, perhaps, but not at present. I shall not go up myself now."

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I do not know," he replied; "I think," he went on after a pause, "I had better go to the coroner's and ask him if it will be necessary to have an inquest. Nothing can be done until we know that; if he says no, I will see about the other arrangements. I suppose it is my business to look after them. If he says yes, there will be nothing else to be done till that is over. I will take a close carriage and drive over to the Court; likely enough they will have heard nothing there as yet about it."

"No, Philip," his mother said, sharply; "not yet. I would not go up to the Court, people might say afterwards that you were in a hurry to take possession."

"No one would say that," he said, throwing back his head haughtily, and then with a change of tone, "you are upset, mother, and not yourself, or I do not think you would have said that. I do not believe that anyone who

knows me would credit me with so mean a thought. Till you spoke, the thought of the difference this would make to me never once entered my mind."

"No doubt you are right, Philip; still I think it is better not to go there to-day, but see about the other arrangements. I will lie down for a bit."

But Mrs. Clitheroe did not lie down. She paced restlessly up and down her room, her brain too busy for her even to sit down for a moment. At last she moved swiftly to the door, opened it and stood listening. No one was moving in that part of the house. As soon as she assured herself of this, she opened the door of the next room and went in. The body lay on the stretcher on which it had been carried up, the ends being placed on two chairs. The doctor had hastily thrown his handkerchief over the face before it was brought into the house, and it still lay there.

Mrs. Clitheroe was at no time a nervous woman, and with scarcely a pause at the door she walked up to the side of the body. She had nerved herself to the task. The overcoat and the coat beneath it were both unbuttoned; for Dr. Vesey had opened them when he first knelt beside the fallen man to see if his heart was still beating. Mrs. Clitheroe thrust her hand into the breast pocket of the undercoat and drew forth several letters. She glanced at the writing outside. One of the envelopes was larger than the rest, and a slight exclamation broke from her as she glanced at it. She replaced the rest, and with this in her hand returned to her room, locking her door behind her. She lighted the gas, for the short day was waning, and but little light made its way through the closely drawn blinds. Then she sat down and opened the envelope.

It contained three papers only: the copies of the certificate of marriage between Algernon Corbyn and Constance Purcell, and copies of the French official documents certifying to the birth and baptism of Constance Corbyn, daughter of Algernon and Constance Corbyn; and to the death and burial of Constance Corbyn, wife of Algernon Corbyn, and daughter of William and Jane Purcell.

Mrs. Clitheroe sat for some time with these papers before her. Should she destroy them? Was there anything to be gained by doing so? Perhaps nothing in the end, but it would retard matters. Did Philip know of the existence

of these papers he would doubtless want to relinquish everything at once, and give up the matter without a struggle. She did not wish that it should be otherwise; he was a Clitheroe rather than a Corbyn, and would not take it to heart that this grandchild of a village schoolmaster should reign at Corbyn Court. Her destroying these papers would probably make no difference; no doubt Algernon had left a will, and it would all come to the same thing. These documents were but copies of registers, and could be easily replaced; still, if they were found at once—for there would no doubt be an examination into all papers and documents—there would be an end to the matter, while, if they were not forthcoming, there would at least be breathing time until the will was opened at any rate. She concluded at last, that they might as well be burned. She opened a desk which stood on the table; took out a small memorandum book and noted down in it the name of the church where the marriage was performed, and those of the minister and of the witnesses to the ceremony. She did this under a vague idea that the information might be possibly useful. Then she rose, twisted up the three papers and the envelope, and held them one by one in the fire that was burning in the grate.

"I do not suppose it will be of any use," she said to herself; "but if there should be a chance I will defend Philip's rights to the end."

There was an inquest and a funeral, and Algernon Corbyn was laid in the old family vault, and Philip Clitheroe took possession of the Court as its unquestioned heir. No will had been found. The family solicitors, upon being communicated with, were unaware that such a will had been prepared. It had certainly not been drawn out by them.

Philip Clitheroe was really sorry for the death of his uncle, although he had never entertained any strong affection for him. There was a lack of cordiality upon the part of the elder man that had kept his nephew aloof from him.

"Uncle always shakes hands as if he did not like it," Philip had once as a boy complained to his mother. "I would much rather that he did not shake hands at all."

"It is only his way," his mother had said. "Your uncle was never a demonstrative man. The Corbyns have always had a quiet manner. You do not take after them, Philip."

"Well, mother, if you do not mind my saying so, I am

glad I do not. I wonder whether uncle when he was a boy always spoke as if he was measuring his words, and whether he ran or shouted like other boys. I should like to see uncle running and shouting."

Mrs. Clitheroe did not even smile an approval, for a joke relating to a Corbyn of Corbyn Court was in her eye almost an act of irreverence.

"I do not like such remarks, Philip," she said sharply. "They are extremely bad form, to say the least of it. Members of a family should never make such remarks about each other. If we do not respect ourselves how can we expect others to respect us."

"Very well, mother," Philip replied good temperedly. "For my part I would rather be liked than respected ever so much."

"And I would very much rather be respected than liked," Mrs. Clitheroe replied, in a tone which effectually put an end to the discussion. But although Philip felt really sorry for the sudden death of his uncle, he was not insensible to the change it had made in his position. The Clitheroe estate was a small one, and his own fondness for hunting, and carelessness about money generally, and his mother's insistence that it was absolutely necessary they should come into Bath for the winter season, had taxed his resources severely. He himself had indeed more than once proposed to put down two of his hunters, but his mother had decidedly objected.

"If you sell any of your horses it would cause talk, Philip. It is true that we are living beyond our income, but you will come in for a fine property some day, and we must keep up our position in the county. We must save in other matters."

But the saving had not been effected, and Philip had been often bothered about money affairs. Although he was the nominal owner of Clitheroe, his mother was completely the mistress as she had been during his father's life, and he never thought of disputing her wishes. Still it was pleasant to him now to know that there was an end to all this. He was master of Corbyn Court, and there was an end of pecuniary worries.

He could marry when he liked now; his mother would, of course, live with him until he did so, and then there would be Clitheroe for her. She had been more shaken by

his uncle's death than he should have expected ; and it seemed to him, although there was no possible reason for such a thing, that she was anxious and nervous. He thought so specially when, on the day after the funeral, young Mr. Ferris came down to make a thorough search with him for his uncle's papers, to make certain that there was no will existing.

"My mother is worrying herself about that will," he said to himself, as he drove over to the Court with young Ferris. "I do not know why she should, for, in the first place, the property is entailed and must come to me, and, in the second, there is no one else for uncle to have left the rest of his property to. He was not likely to take it into his head to endow a charity."

"I do not think that there is much chance of our finding anything," James Ferris said as they entered the house. "Mr. Corbyn was not at all the sort of man to have made a will secretly and stowed it away ; besides, there could be no possible reason for his doing so. I daresay he meant to come to us one day and get us to draw it out for him. Men generally like to leave a few legacies to old servants and so on, but you see he had every reason to expect to live another thirty or forty years, and it naturally appeared to him that there was no hurry about it. It is singular how men put off making their wills. There are no places that you know of, except the safe in his library, where he kept papers ?"

"Not that I know of. I looked in the safe three days ago, but I could see nothing but a lot of leases and agreements, and several files of paid bills, and a bundle or two of letters."

"The leases and agreements were principally copies," James Ferris said, "we have got the originals in his safe in our cellars, with the deeds of the property and other important papers, but he liked having copies of the leases to refer to when tenants wanted things done. We persuaded him to let us have the originals, for these old country mansions are very unsafe places. Once they catch fire down they go. Well, here we are."

The door of the safe was opened, and the bundles of leases untied to make sure that there was no will among them.

"Is it worth while keeping all the receipts?" Philip asked, as he took up the next bundle.

"Certainly. After a death is the time when they are most useful. People are apt to send in their accounts again on the off chance that the receipts have not been kept, and of course the executors have no means otherwise of knowing whether they have been paid or not."

"We may as well destroy the letters, at any rate," Philip said. "It is not necessary to read them, I suppose?"

"No, you see they are tied up and docketed. Here are 'Letters connected with the letting of the home farm,' 'Correspondence concerning question of water rates.' It is no use keeping these things, they are all settled and done with long ago. What is that?" he asked, as Philip gave a sudden exclamation. "Ah!" 'Letters from my daughter.' Humph! That is more important indeed," and the young men looked each other in the face.

"You do not think that uncle was married, Ferris?"

"Most improbable thing in the world, I should say. Mr. Corbyn, from what I knew of him, was the most unlikely man to have made a marriage beneath him. Besides, if he had done so during his father's lifetime, there was no reason why he should not have acknowledged it when he came into the property. Oh, no; I should say that the chances of his being married are next to nothing."

"But what is to be done with these letters?" Philip asked.

"I can't give an opinion off hand, the matter is altogether too serious. It must be for my father to decide. As I said, I do not think there is one chance in a hundred of Mr. Corbyn having married. I regard such a thing as improbable in the extreme. Still——" and he paused.

"Yes, it would be awkward," Philip said, grimly. "You see that as there is no will the unentailed as well as the entailed property would go to her, as you know the entail goes with us in the female line. Well, of course, Ferris, as the family lawyer you must do your duty in the matter. *Fiat justitia*, you know," he added, with an attempt to laugh.

"Really, I do not think there is any fear of its turning out in that way, Clitheroe. I think it likely that your uncle, whose father was a very proud and stern man, committed some sort of escapade, as thousands of men have done before him, and you see a child has been the result."

"You had better glance through the letters, Ferris. I think I would rather not read them. I will light my pipe while you are looking through them," and he turned his chair round to the fire.

For a quarter of an hour no word was spoken. Philip Clitheroe sat puffing his pipe and gazing into the fire. It would indeed be awkward, as he had said, if his uncle had been married. His mother would take it to heart a good deal more than he should. He himself had never regarded his heirship of Corbyn Court as anything but a very remote contingency. His uncle had been but sixteen years older than himself, and might have lived until ninety if it had not been for this accident. He had seriously thought several times of going *abroad* for a few years, and leaving Clitheroe in his mother's hands. As long as he was at home she would never *retrench*; she thought too much of keeping up his position in the county. That was all well enough if he were heir to Corbyn, but as only owner of Clitheroe it would be absurd. He was thinking this over when the lawyer spoke.

"I gather from these letters, Clitheroe, that this girl has been brought up by some people named Duport at St. Malo. She only writes twice a year, and in the first letter, which is dated ten years back, she says she is seven, so she is seventeen now. She signs herself Constance Corbyn; but, of course, that goes for nothing. He would naturally have passed her mother off as his wife. There is no allusion to a mother through all the letters, so it is probable that she is either dead or that she took up with someone else, leaving the child to be taken care of by him. I see that in one letter each year she speaks as having seen him not long before; so I suppose he went over once a year to see her. Certainly the letters prove nothing one way or the other; but I suppose we shall have to investigate the matter."

"Certainly," Philip agreed, "of course. If there was a marriage, there is an end of the matter. If not, I will get you to arrange that the allowance, whatever it is, that my uncle paid, shall be continued, and you can make any arrangement you think right for a sum of money to be paid to her when she comes of age or marries. Such an arrangement as you think it probable my uncle would have made had he left a will."

The lawyer nodded.

"I understand," he said. "I daresay I shall have to go over. When I see in what way she has been brought up, I shall be able to form a more definite idea as to what is to be done in the matter. As to the first alternative, I hope and believe that there is little chance of its accuracy."

"I imagine that you must have seen the unexpected occur pretty often in your profession, Ferris. However, whatever comes of it I don't think I shall break my heart over it. Of course it is rather a blow at first—you wouldn't believe me if I said it wasn't—but I am not sure that I am cut out for a squire of high degree, and shall enjoy life quite as much if I have to make my own way a bit. I am really thinking more of my mother than of myself: it would be a great blow to her for me to lose the Court just when as it seemed I ^{was} so unexpectedly come into it."

"Yes, Mrs. Clitheroe would feel it," James Ferris agreed, for he had dined with the Clitheroes several times when they had been up in London, and had not been favorably impressed by Mrs. Clitheroe's manner.

"A clever woman, father," he had said, "but as hard as nails and as proud as Lucifer, though what she has to be so proud about I don't know. I wonder her son is such a pleasant fellow, brought up by a woman like that; but it is evident she is extremely fond of him, her voice quite softens when she speaks to him. I daresay she has her good points."

"I expect so, Jim; most of them have, but I agree with you, Mrs. Clitheroe is hard. You know she put her affairs into our hands at her husband's death, because we have always been Mr. Corbyn's lawyers, and she never forgets that she is a Corbyn. She is a capital hand at business, but I came to the conclusion that I would rather be her lawyer than her debtor."

"Do you mean to tell her, Clitheroe?" James Ferris asked after he had revolved these matters in his mind.

"I think I had better not," Philip replied, after a pause. "Of course if you will find out that there was a marriage she will know all about it soon enough; if not, I do not see why she should know anything about it."

"I don't see why she should, things of this sort are just as well kept quiet. No, I agree with you it will be better to say nothing about it unless we should discover that

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there really was a marriage. At any rate we must make a thorough search for a will. As matters stood before it seemed of little consequence whether one existed or not, but the matter is completely altered now.

For the next two or three hours the young men searched in every drawer, cabinet, or other place where papers were likely to be stowed away, but no documents of any kind were found.

"It is quite possible, Clitheroe," the young lawyer said, when the search was concluded, "that we may hear of a will yet. So long as we made sure that a will would be made in your favor, there was no reason whatever why your uncle should go to anyone else, but the case is altogether altered now. He would not like us to have known about this business, and would probably have gone elsewhere to get his will made. Mind, I think it very much more likely that he has never given it a moment's consideration, but if he did so, that is the course he would be likely to pursue."

"Well, I shall not bother any more about it, Ferris. I consider that the matter is now in your hands as the solicitor to the family. That takes all the responsibility off my shoulders, but please impress upon your father that my anxiety will be to do what is right. If the girl is entitled to the estates, well and good; if not, I wish the arrangements to be made on a liberal scale. You said that you must go back this afternoon. Can't I persuade you to stop until the morning?"

"No, thank you, I really want to get up to town for we are very busy at present, and have got a very heavy case just coming on. In the next place I want to hear what my father thinks about this affair, and lastly I don't think that we should spend a very enjoyable evening. We have both got this thing in our minds and could talk about nothing else, although no amount of talking can throw any further light upon it. So I will carry out my original intentions."

Philip looked at his watch. "We have ample time to have the horses put in and drive comfortably down to the station. After what has happened you will not catch me driving down that hill again fast.

After seeing James Ferris off by the train, Philip handed the reins to the groom, told him to take the horses back to

the stables, and then strolled slowly back to Royal terrace, thinking the matter over in every light. His mother was in the drawing-room when he went up. It was getting dusk, and she was sitting with her back to the window, and a magazine in her hand, which, as she sat, served to screen her face from the fire.

"You have been a long time, Philip. I think you might have come straight back from the station. I heard that the carriage came back half an hour ago."

"I beg your pardon, mother. I made so sure after my own search through the papers that no will would be found, it did not strike me that you would be anxious about it. We have looked everywhere so far as we know, and no will has come to hand, and Ferris did not expect to find one any more than I did."

"I did not think there would be one myself, for Algernon was not of a nature to trouble himself about matters that could conveniently be put off, and he had of course no reason to anticipate that any necessity would arise for many years for his making a will."

"No, that is our idea, mother."

Philip was standing so that the light both from the window and fire fell on his face, and his mother saw at once that something unusual had happened.

"He has found some papers or letters relating to her," she said to herself. "No proofs certainly that would show them that she is heiress to the Court, for in that case he would tell me at once; there could be no reason for concealing it, besides it is not his way. If he had found out that he had lost the Court, he would be as likely as not to mention it to the first half dozen acquaintances that he met in the street." It was irritating that it should be so, and yet Mrs. Clitheroe loved her son no less that his disposition differed so widely from her own, and that he took after his dead father rather than her.

"He has found some clue," she repeated to herself, "but he does not mean to tell me. He has learned that Algernon had a daughter, but not that she is legitimate. If he thought she were, he would tell me at once. He and that young Ferris have come to the conclusion that she is illegitimate, and therefore the thing is to be kept a secret from me. I must think over whether I had better broach the subject and let him know that I am aware of her exist-

ence, then I should learn what steps they were taking, but on the other hand there are many reasons why it would be better that he should think me ignorant about it."

This was what she thought, she only said, "I suppose you will be moving into the Court soon, Philip. There seems no reason why you should not do so."

"Yes, I suppose I might as well, mother, or rather we might as well. Corbyn is so much nearer than Clitheroe, that it will be a great deal more convenient for the town. Of course it will be a question for you to decide whether we shall keep on this house." Then Mrs. Clitheroe knew that the two young men had considered it morally certain that this girl of whose existence they had learnt was not born in wedlock.

"There will be plenty of time to think about that, Philip," she replied; "of course we shall shut up Clitheroe. Corbyn is only three quarters of an hour's drive, but that counts for a good deal in winter. At any rate we have got this house on our hands for another year and a half, and shall be able to see how things work before that; but there is no doubt that it is right and proper that you should take possession of the Court at once."

"I suppose it is the right thing to do," he agreed rather reluctantly. "I should say though it is better to let a week or so pass first, I do not want to seem to be in a hurry to step into uncle's shoes."

"Very well, Philip, there is of course no hurry about it," but Mrs. Clitheroe at once guessed that Philip wished to delay until he had made quite certain as to the status of this unknown cousin. "Ferris is going to make inquiries," she said to herself. "I would give a good deal to find out what the girl herself knows."

This indeed was the point upon which Mrs. Clitheroe's thoughts had been fixed from the moment when she burned the copy of the marriage certificate. Another copy might be found among her brother's papers, though this was hardly likely, or there might be some memorandum which would afford a clue. Fortunately there could be no letters which would give this information, for the mother had not returned to England, and had never been separated from Algernon from the time of their marriage, therefore no letters between them could be in existence. Still Algernon might have given copies of the certificates to the girl in order that the

people she lived with might have proofs of the marriage. Possibly, too, he might have made a will and left it with them. Everything depended upon what he had done ; if he had taken these precautions Corbyn Court was of course lost to Philip, if he had not she might preserve it for him.

Both Mrs. Clitheroe and her son talked more than usual that evening, for both were anxious to conceal the fact that they were preoccupied, and it was a relief to them when the hour for going to bed arrived.

"It is no use bothering about it," Philip said angrily to himself when he was alone, "I am a fool to worry. Ferris seems to have no doubt that it is all right, and if it isn't I should not fret myself about it, so why should I bother now. I will not let myself think any more of it until I hear from him the result of his inquiries. I think I will run up to town for three or four days ; I suppose it would not be the right thing for me to go into the club for another week or so, and I should mope to death if I had to stay here doing nothing till then."

Philip adhered to his resolution not to allow his thoughts to dwell any more upon the discovery made that afternoon, and accordingly he was sound asleep in half an hour. His mother sat for hours before the fire in her bedroom, and when she at last got into bed there was no sleep for her until daylight began to break. Then her mind was thoroughly made up.

"I will do it," she said grimly. "Philip shall not be defrauded of his rights, and no peasant's grand-daughter shall reign in the old House of the Corbyns, if I can prevent it."

The next morning at breakfast Philip, with some doubt as to how his mother would receive the proposition, said that he had been thinking of running up to London for a few days.

"I can't very well go down to the club or meet people just at present, mother, everyone would think it their duty to talk about uncle's death, and I would rather get out of it for the present if," he added, "you will not find it very dull by yourself here."

He was pleased at receiving a cordial assent to his proposal from Mrs. Clitheroe.

"I think it is a very good idea, Philip, it will make a change for you, and on your return you can go straight

back to the Court, and I will join you there. We will stop there for a week or two just to take possession, and then return here till the spring. By the time we come back you will be able to resume your former habits and to hunt again if you like. There is no occasion for a nephew to shut himself up for any long time after the death of an uncle. I shall not find it lonely here. I shall get on very well until your return."

"Then I may as well go up to-day by the express?"

"I think that is the best thing you can do, Philip." Accordingly Philip went up to London by the twelve o'clock train.

CHAPTER III.

CONSTANCE CORBYN.

It is awkward business, James, a very awkward business," Mr. Ferris, sen., said irritably. "I cannot think why men will make fools of themselves, and then, as a matter of course, leave it to us to do the unpleasant part of the business. I don't agree with you that it is so extremely improbable that Corbyn should have married, or that, having married, he should have gone on concealing it after his father's death. From what I have seen of the man, I have always regarded him as an ass, and there is no ass worse than the man who is puffed up because people of the same name have lived in the same house some hundreds of years. It's no credit to him if they have, it simply shows that they were respectable mediocrities who had not spirit to join rebellions, or get engaged in plots, or even to run into extravagances. In my opinion Corbyn was just the sort of man who would be fool enough to make a secret marriage, and weak enough to be afraid to make an honest confession of it, and face the talk of his neighbors afterwards. Bah! I would rather have a rogue for a client than such weak creatures as these." He threw down the pen he had in his hand, and rubbed his head irritably. "Well, I suppose what you suggest is the best thing to be done. Either you or Meredith had better go over to St. Malo and find the girl out, the people she lives with will be sure to be known."

"I think I had better go myself," the younger man said. "It will be a very unpleasant business, but I think I could do it somewhat more sympathetically than Meredith."

"Yes, I suppose you could," Mr. Ferris admitted. "Meredith is an excellent clerk, but scarcely a man for a delicate mission. You see, in the first place you will have to break the news of her father's death to the girl; fortunately it is not likely she can have any very lively

affection for him, as she seems to have seen him only once a year ; however, there is never any telling. I have seen so many instances of women caring for worthless brutes, that I believe anything is possible with them. Then when that part of the business is over, you will have to find out what she really knows about her birth, whether she has any documents relating to it, any clue that we can follow up to find out whether Corbyn was married to her mother or not. As you say young Clitheroe has given you *carte blanche* to make any monetary arrangement you think proper—and I consider him a young fool for doing so—that part of your business will be easy. Now don't go and make a fool of yourself, James ; it isn't because young Clitheroe is a fool that you should neglect his interest and allow yourself to be so worked upon by the sighs of a girl in tears as to make arrangements of altogether unnecessary liberality. I know what you young fellows are ; you lose your heads altogether directly you see a young woman in the case."

"I will try and keep my head, father."

"Well, well, this is all very annoying ; of course, you will get back as soon as you can, you know how busy we are at present."

"I know, sir. I will cross to-night to Paris, and go straight down from there. I won't waste an hour more than I can help over the business. It is very far from a pleasant one."

In a pretty little house standing detached, commanding a view over the town of St. Malo, and the sea beyond, dwelt M. and Madame Duport ; it would perhaps have been more correct to put the lady first, for there could be no doubt that she was the moving spirit of the establishment. Madame Duport was a native of Jersey, her father was a cultivator on a small scale, and having a family out of all proportion to the extent of his holding, he was glad to accept the offer of an English visitor to the Island to take Annette, the eldest of his girls, as a nursemaid. She had gone away to England and did not return for fifteen years, when she came back with what seemed to her family a little fortune. She had only remained for three years in the nursery, when her mistress had promoted her to the position of her own maid. Annette was prudent and economical, she was a good needlewoman, and had a genius for dress-

making, and, as she had the reversion of her mistress' gowns, she had been able to lay by almost every penny of her earnings.

Her mistress had died after a painful illness, during which Annette had nursed her with untiring devotion. As the only daughter had married the year before, her master had no further need for her services, but he made her a present of a hundred pounds, and with this and her savings of fifteen years she returned to Jersey. Her stay there was a short one, for she had already been engaged for three years to Victor Duport, a teacher of French in London. He and Annette had talked the matter over reasonably; they were no longer young and impetuous. She was thirty, he was twelve years older.

"We must wait a little longer, Victor. My lady is ill, the doctors say she will never recover. She has been a very good friend to me, and I will not leave her. It may not be many months, and I do not suppose I shall be losing my time, for her husband is generous. We have always agreed that we will go to St. Malo when we are married. Life will be very dull here. With your earnings and mine we can buy a pretty house and furnish it in English fashion. You can give lessons in English, and I will look after the house and let lodgings to English visitors. We ought to be able to do very comfortably; we are sure to let during the season, for English people like being with some one who speaks their tongue and understands their ways."

And so a few weeks after Annette's return home, M. Duport arrived to claim her, and as soon as they were married the house at St. Malo was bought and furnished.

This was seventeen years ago. Madame Duport was now forty-seven, but her cheeks were still rosy, her eyes bright, her foot light and active, and her figure trim. She would have passed any where as ten years younger than her real age. Except that she had grieved a little because she had never been blessed with children, Madame Duport had scarcely known a care. For fifteen years she had been a favorite servant, for another seventeen she had been absolute mistress of her house, and had been, as she herself admitted, 'exceptionally lucky. This good fortune began within a fortnight of her settling at St. Malo. There had been no demand at present for M. Duport's services as a teacher of English, but he had in accordance with his

wife's instructions decided to go down regularly to meet the *diligences* and steamers.

"Do not push yourself forward, Victor, English people are always suspicious of anyone who thrusts himself upon them. Stand by and wait. If you see people who have lost their luggage, or who can only speak a little of the language, and who seem confused and bewildered, go up to them and lift your hat and ask if you can be of any use. There is nothing lost if they want to go to an hotel. Take them there by all means, and give them all the assistance you can. You will meet them accidentally a day or two afterwards, they will recognize you and may perhaps by that time have made up their minds to take lodgings. You will bring the subject round to that if you speak with them, and mention that your wife, who has been lady's maid in an English family, has apartments which would perhaps suit them. If at your first meeting you find they wish to go into lodgings at once, the matter will be easy."

The very first day that M. Duport carried out his wife's instructions, a gentleman and lady landed by the boat. From their appearance they were evidently English, and were at once surrounded by touts from the hotels. The Englishman hesitated and said to the lady in her own language, "I suppose, Constance, we must go to an hotel for a day or two, and we can then look round for lodgings to suit us."

This was Victor's opportunity. He stepped forward and raised his hat and said in English, "Pardon me, sir, but if you intend to go into lodgings, my wife, who has been lady's maid in an English family, has apartments that might suit you and madame. It is a detached house with a pretty garden and a fine view of the sea."

"That sounds just the thing, Constance. What do you think?"

"Oh, yes," she said eagerly, "it would be so nice being with people who speak English."

"Do you take other lodgers?" the gentleman asked, turning to Victor.

"We have only one set of apartments," he replied.

"Well, I suppose we may as well go and see them, but what shall we do with our luggage?"

"The house lies at the top of the hill, sir, and is perhaps rather far for madame to walk, but I will with your per-

mission call a *fiacre* which will take her and the luggage up. If, when you arrive there, you find the rooms will not suit you, the vehicle will be at my charge."

"That is a fair offer anyhow, Constance, and we had better accept it."

The lady took her place in the vehicle that Victor brought up. The luggage, which was heavy, was piled up in it. M. Duport and the Englishman walked on in front up the steep streets.

"You speak English very well, monsieur."

"I have had the honor of being a teacher of French in London for twenty years," M. Duport replied. "I have but lately returned, and now teach English to such as may require it here in my native town."

"I hope that I shall like your place, for I am not good at French, and my wife talks very little of the language. We are likely to stay here for some little time, and it will be a great comfort to her having a woman with her who speaks English."

Constance Corbyn was delighted with the apartments, with the garden surrounded by high walls, except on the side looking seaward, and above all with Annette.

"This is delightful, Algernon," she said, when they were alone; "it is almost as good as being in England. How fortunate we are in finding such a place."

Nor was Madame Duport less pleased. "This is a stroke of luck indeed, Victor, just at the end of the season to get lodgers who will stay here for three or four months, for it is easy to see that they will be here for that time. It is of course a little strange, but that is not our business, they agreed to our terms without bargaining, which is all that concerns us."

"What is there strange, Annette?"

"Ah, but you men are stupid; why should an English gentleman, for it is easy to see that he is a gentleman, bring his wife to St. Malo to be confined instead of taking her home to some friends; there is a mystery in it, Victor, but it is none the worse for that; where there is a mystery there is money to be made."

For two months Algernon Corbyn and his wife lived in perfect contentment and happiness at "Belle Vue," for so Madame Duport had named their house. Then came the event that spoilt Algernon Corbyn's life. A child was

born, and a week later its mother laid in the grave. No one could have been kinder or more attentive than Madame Duport had been during that terrible time; she had become much attached to her lodger, and her death was a real grief to her.

"She was an angel," she said, wiping her eyes, as she sat with her husband on the evening after the funeral. "She was too good for her husband. He is pleasant and he loved her, but he is like men, he loved himself more. He is selfish, I am sure of it; while she thought always about him, poor angel. Perhaps it is best for her, for she would have many troubles in store. He would have tired of her in time. Ah, these men, but they are selfish."

"I am sure, Annette—" M. Duport remonstrated, but she waived the personal question aside, and he went on. "But you said the other day that you had changed your mind, Annette, and that you were convinced now that they were married."

"Yes, I am sure of it, though I did not think so at first. When we were talking together a week before the child was born, she said something about her marriage to me. I am sure that she was not lying; at any rate she believed that she was married. You will see, Victor, that he will ask me to take care of the child."

"Why should he, Annette?"

"Because married or not married there is a secret in the affair. He could not take his wife home, or he would not not have brought her here, and, therefore he will not know what to do with the child. It will seem to him an easy way out of his difficulties to leave her here with me. I would wager anything he will ask me."

"And you will say——"

"I shall, of course, say yes; the child will take up no room in the house. I shall have a *bonne* for her, a girl who will be useful to me also when we have lodgers. The baby will be no trouble, and no doubt he will offer to pay well. A selfish man is ready to pay anything to save himself trouble. You will see."

Annette's judgment was speedily justified. The bell rang a few minutes afterwards. She was absent a quarter of an hour, and when she returned to her husband she said, "I was right, Victor, he has asked me to take care of the child at present. He tells me that he married with-

out his father's consent, and that he cannot take the child home during his lifetime. He will pay us one hundred pounds a year to take care of her. What do you think of that? It is magnificent, and it may last for years. Oh, it was a good day when I sent you down to meet the steamer, Victor. I have told him he must go down to the Mairie and register the birth of the child. He will do that early to-morrow, and will leave for Paris directly he has done it."

"But suppose you never hear of him again, Annette," M. Duport said cautiously.

"I have no fear of that, Victor. I do not admire his character, but he will not do that; he was fond of the mother, and he will not desert the child. He will to-morrow give me half-a-year's payment in advance. He says he will come over from time to time to see the child, but I do not think that we shall see him often."

As time went on, and no children were born to Madame Duport, she came to regard the little girl as her own. She had been right in her conjecture that its father's visits would not be frequent, and indeed it was not until Constance was three years old that he again made his appearance at St. Malo. He had particularly requested that she should be taught English as soon as she could speak, and the child was already able to prattle with equal facility in that language and in French. Her father was much pleased with her appearance and manner, and spent several days at Belle Vue, where it happened the rooms were at the time vacant.

After that he had come once a year, and as upon the occasion of these visits he always came provided with a store of presents purchased in Paris, not only toys, but dresses, hats and cloaks, the child came to look forward eagerly to the visits. When she was ten years old, he told Madame Duport that he would henceforth double the allowance he paid if she would take no other lodgers, a proposal to which she very willingly agreed. He also requested that she should be sent to the best school in the town, and as she got on, have the advantages of professors in music and drawing, he undertaking all these expenses.

"He must have come into money," Annette said to her husband after he had left, "perhaps he has married again a lady with money. Perhaps his father is dead."

"Then why should he not have her home?" M. Duport asked.

"Because he is a man," Madame Duport said, in a tone of contempt, "and men hate trouble and talk. Bah! they are poor creatures."

This was rather hard upon M. Duport, who certainly spared no trouble, and who had by this time a *clientele* and taught English in several schools, and was dubbed Professor. He was as fond of the child as was his wife, and when not engaged was her constant companion in her walks, and at home when Madame Duport was occupied with domestic matters. Constance had been but a few days at school, when she returned flushed and breathless, for, accustomed to English ways, Annette had not brought her up rigidly, according to French notions, and when out with her she would run or walk as she chose, and had grown up healthy and strong and natural.

"Madame," she burst out, "I want to know why I am here instead of being in England with my papa? The girls have been asking me, and I could not tell them; and they looked very disagreeable, as if it was a sin that I should not know. Why is it?"

Annette had been dreading this question for some time, for she knew that it would come sooner or later.

"I can only tell you, Constance, what your father thought right to tell me. He was married without the consent of his father. People cannot marry without their parents' consent in France, but they can in England. Still, of course, if they do so their fathers can leave all their money away from them; so you see your father was obliged to keep his marriage a secret. No doubt if your dear mother had lived your father would in time have taken her home with him and would have gone hand in hand with her to his father, and would have said, 'this is my wife, you cannot help forgiving me and loving her,' and indeed no one could have known her without loving her. But when she died he did not care, I suppose, to brave his father's anger until you grew older, so that he could take you back, as he would have done her, and now you see he is having you educated so that he can be proud of you when you go home."

"I don't think I want to go home," Constance said, "I am very happy here with you and M. Duport. Must I go if I do not want to?"

"Of course you must go with your father when he says it is time, child, but it will be a sore day for us here."

"But when will it be?"

"Ah, that I cannot tell you. I should think when you grow up, or, perhaps, if your grandfather dies, before that."

"If I had a little girl," Constance said, decidedly, "I should keep her with me. I should not mind what anyone said."

"Very likely, deary," Annette said, "but you see all people are not alike, and then things are different in England."

"I don't think I should like England. The people I see here in summer look merry and good tempered, but they dress strangely and wear ugly hats and talk and laugh so very loud."

"Yes, dear, but then what you see are most of them not the best sort, only people who come across here for a week's holiday, and they do not dress like that at home."

"Why should they do it here then?" Constance asked indignantly.

"It is a way they have, dear. When they go to the sea-side or travel, they wear hats and dresses and things they would not think of wearing in the streets at home. It is their way."

"Then I think it is a very ugly way, and when I go to England I shall dress as a lady always. A lady ought to look like a lady, ought she not, madame?"

"Well, yes, dear, I suppose she should, and you will find that most real ladies do so, but as I said, a great many of these people who you see here are not ladies, not such ladies as I was accustomed to see in the family where I lived, anyhow."

"I do not want to go to England, madame, and I shall tell papa so next time he comes."

"I should not do that," madame said hastily. "Of course, if he asks you if you are in any hurry to go away with him you can say no, but he would not be pleased if he thought that you were set against your own people."

Constance did not answer, but tossed her head and walked off into the garden.

"She is like her mother in some things," Madame Dupont said to herself, looking after her. "She is like her something in face and she has got her smiles and pretty

ways, and she has an affectionate nature too like her, but there it ends. She has got a will of her own and is not to be led as her dear mother was. I don't know where she gets it from, and that way of hers of tossing back her head and carrying herself as if she were a little duchess. She reminds me of him in feature sometimes, but he is weak and selfish. I always told Victor so; and she is strong willed and never thinks of herself. She is just like the girls I used to see at my lady's; straightforward and honest and natural. Anyone could see that she is English at once by her walk and her manner, in spite of the French fashion of her dress. Her father never comes without saying 'make her as English as you can, madame'; and I have done my best. I heard two English women say the other day when I was with her down in the market-place: 'Look at that girl—what a regular English face; but of course she is French, for she was chattering away in French to that woman she is with; besides she is dressed in French fashion; but she is as English as can be in looks, and she steps out without mincing.'

"They talked quite loud, as is the way with this sort of people before foreigners, making sure that they cannot understand their language; and they looked nicely surprised when I turned round and said: 'Perhaps you are right, madame, and perhaps you are wrong'; and walked on again without taking any more notice of them. When she grows up her father will find that he cannot twist her round his finger like he could her mother. Poor child! I am afraid she will have trouble. She is hot and impetuous, and full of heart. He is cold, and hasn't a heart the size of a walnut. He is a poor creature although he does pay well."

In the seven years that had since passed Constance Corbyn had grown up straight and tall. Her figure was scarcely formed yet; far less so than those of her school-mates of the same age. Her manner was somewhat quiet, for although she seldom spoke of it now, she thought a great deal of her singular position, thus brought up in a foreign land and knowing nothing of her position save that her father seemed a wealthy man. She had never spoken to him on the subject. At first she had been silent because Annette had told her that it might vex him to ask questions; of late years because she was too proud to broach the

subject until he did so himself. She was a favorite at school, but a spiteful tongue would occasionally bring the hot blood to her face by some sneering remark as to the mystery which hung over her position.

For her father she felt no love. Such affection as had been purchased in her childish days by presents had gradually died away, and a feeling of angry resentment at his silence had taken its place. There was no sympathy whatever between her warm nature and his cool one, but at the bottom of it all, perhaps, was an unconscious championship of her dead mother. Annette had never spoken a word to her against her father, but whenever she spoke of her mother there was so much pity and commiseration in the constantly-uttered "Poor angel," "Poor lamb," that it lead Constance to feel that her mother had not been fairly treated by him. There was no real heart in the labored excuses Annette made for her strange bringing up abroad. She herself as she grew up had in her intercourse with her father found out that between his nature and hers there was scarcely a point of similarity.

However, she was soon to get to the bottom of the mystery. He had on the occasion of his last visit said, "The next time I come, Constance, I shall probably take you away with me and present you to your relations in England. You will be of an age then to take your place at the head of my establishment. We shall perhaps go for a few months' tour to give you manners, and set you at your ease. I am happy to say that you have turned out just as I should wish you."

"I wonder," the girl said, bitterly, that night as she stood before her looking-glass, "whether if I had turned out differently he would ever have had me home at all. Madame says that though I am thin and not much to look at now, I shall be pretty presently, and I suppose papa thinks so too, though I am sure I don't see it. I am not a bit rosy and round-faced as I used to be. Still he thinks so, and thinks I shall look well at the head of his establishment, and so he's going to place me there. If I had been squat and ugly I expect I should have stayed this side of the water all my life, and he would have given me a dot to get a husband in St. Malo. I would not go if it was not for mother. If he acknowledges me he must acknowledge her, which he never had courage enough to do while she was alive."

A year had passed since then, and Annette's predictions had been fulfilled. Constance Corbyn was not what is usually called a beauty, but her face, with its broad, smooth forehead, soft earnest eyes, and tender mouth, strengthened by the firm and somewhat square chin, was one that most men would look at twice. Her figure was still slender, and over rather than under the middle height. There was a certain air of pride in the carriage of the head and figure, an unconscious protest against those who had tried to humiliate her.

One day at twelve o'clock just as breakfast was over, the servant came in and said that an English gentleman wished to speak with M. Duport. She brought in a card.

"Who is it, Victor?"

"I know not," he replied, glancing at it. "It is a Mr. James Ferris of Lincoln's inn. That is a place for lawyers. I will go and see what he wants."

"I have come over, M. Duport," the young man began, "upon a very painful mission. I may say to begin with that our firm are solicitors to Mr. Corbyn's family."

M. Duport's attitude at once changed. He eyed his visitor sharply with a look of suspicious scrutiny.

"Do I understand," he said, "that you have come to speak on business connected with Mr. Corbyn?"

"That is so, M. Duport."

"In that case, monsieur, I shall with your permission request Madame Duport to be present. She has a clear head, and I should wish her to hear any communication that you have to make."

"I shall be glad to have the advantage of Madame Duport's presence," Mr. James Ferris said politely.

M. Duport went to the door. "Annette," he cried, and then as his wife came out from the salle, "This gentleman has business with you also."

Somewhat surprised, Madame Duport followed her husband into the sitting-room. James Ferris rose and bowed.

"This gentleman, Annette, belongs to the firm who manage the business affairs of Monsieur Corbyn."

Annette's face changed as rapidly as that of her husband had done. So at last she was going to hear something. But why send over a lawyer? And she, too, looked suspiciously at James Ferris.

"In the first place, madame," he said, "I have a communication to make which will doubtless be painful to you

and still more so to the young lady residing with you."

Annette gave him no assistance, but kept her eyes with a steady enquiring look upon his face, while her fingers played with her dress impatiently.

"Our client, Mr. Algernon Corbyn," he went on, "was a few days since thrown from his vehicle and killed upon the spot."

A low "A—h" came from Annette's half-closed lips, while M. Duport uttered an exclamation betokening at once surprise and regret.

"I thought it best," James Ferris went on, "to acquaint you, in the first place, with this in order that you might break the sad intelligence to his daughter. It would come much better from you than it would from a stranger."

"Apres?" Annette said, still sitting immovable.

"The next part of my duty," James Ferris went on, wishing from the bottom of his heart that he had not volunteered to undertake this unpleasant business, "will be to ask you some questions if you will be good enough to answer them. In the course of some investigations into the papers of the late Mr. Corbyn by his nephew and myself, we came upon some letters from which we learned the fact, altogether unsuspected by us, that Mr. Corbyn had left a daughter, and that she had been brought up in your charge. Beyond the fact of her existence and age, we learned nothing, and as the solicitor of the family, I, therefore, deemed it my duty to come over to obtain such information concerning her as you could afford me. I may say that Mr. Corbyn has died without, so far as we know, leaving a will."

A heavy cloud was gathering on Madame Duport's face; her brows nearly met across her forehead; there was an angry sparkle in her eye and an added color to her cheek. M. Duport, who was not unfamiliar with these symptoms, discreetly held his tongue.

"What sort of information to you require?" she asked slowly.

"Any information that you can give me, madame. You see we are entirely in the dark, we have simply the letters of the young lady herself to her father. What we require is of course information such as will enable us to place this young lady in possession of her rights as soon as we ascertain what those rights are. I may say that when the proofs

are forthcoming there will be no opposition whatever on the part of Mr. Corbyn's nephew, Mr. Clitheroe, who has been brought up to regard himself as Mr. Corbyn's natural heir. I can assure you that my visit is a friendly one, and that you will be wrong to regard me as hostile. As the solicitor to the family my duty is simply to see that the person entitled to the property, whoever he or she may be, shall obtain legal possession of it. My first question then is, have you or she, the young lady, any documents belonging to Mr. Corbyn in your possession?"

"*Tais-toi*, Victor," Madame Duport said sharply, as she saw her husband prepare to speak.

"It seems to me, monsieur, that it will not be wise for us to entrust such documents as we may have concerning a matter so vital as the future of our child Constance—for she has been as our child from the day she was born—to a stranger. I ask you should we not rather place them in the hands of a lawyer here, and instruct him to take the legal steps to place Constance in the possession of her rights."

"Undoubtedly, madame, you can take that step; and I can only repeat that my instructions from Mr. Clitheroe are to make no opposition whatever, as soon as I am furnished with legal proof that this young lady is the daughter of Mr. Corbyn and his wife," and James Ferris laid an accent on the last word.

"Do you venture to say that Mr. Corbyn was not married to that angel who died here?"

"Not at all, madame; I say nothing, for I know nothing. I only know that this young lady wrote for years to Mr. Corbyn as his daughter. We do not know as much as the name of her mother, nor—except from the fact that she is not mentioned in her daughter's letters—do we know of her death. I may tell you that the documents that will be required are, in the first place, proof of the marriage of Algernon Corbyn with this lady; and, in the second, proof that this young lady in your care is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Corbyn, born after their marriage."

"The latter you can find for yourself," Madame Duport said. "At the Mairie there is the register of the birth of the child. It is stated there that she is the child of Mr. Corbyn and his wife Constance; and that statement is testified to by Mr. Corbyn himself. I can prove that I took the child from her dead mother's side, and that I have

brought her up ever since. What more proof do you require than that? Mr. Corbyn acknowledged it as the child of himself and his wife."

"That is excellent as far as it goes, madame, but such statement would not be received by the law of our country as proof of the marriage. You see the poor lady had passed here as Mrs. Corbyn, and Mr. Corbyn after her death, both for her sake and that of the child whom he had arranged should stay here, would naturally register the child as born in wedlock. Still of course it goes for something, and now all we have to look for is the certificate of marriage. It is probable that a copy of such certificate would be among any papers Mr. Corbyn may have left in your or his daughter's hands; if not it could be obtained by searching the register of the church at which they were married."

"I am sure they were married," Annette burst out passionately. "She spoke to me once of her marriage, and I am sure that she was speaking the truth. I would as soon doubt the saints of heavens as doubt her word."

"Did she say where, Madame Duport?" James Ferris, who was by this time convinced that Annette Duport had no documents in her possession, asked. Madame Duport was silent. "Did she speak," he went on, "of it as taking place at the sea-side or in London or in some quiet country church? You see if we have any clue we can follow it up. An advertisement offering a reward will often produce evidence of this kind if one has but a clue to the locality." Madame Duport still sat silent. "Any information you can give may be of importance, and you will be injuring, instead of benefiting, the young lady by withholding anything you can tell me. I can assure you I have her interest at heart as much as that of Mr. Clitheroe, and I need hardly say that we have better means of following a clue than any lawyer here could have."

"No," Madame Duport said at last. "I can remember nothing of the sort you mention. She spoke of her marriage casually several times. She said once, I remember, that she left England the day after she was married."

"That is something at least, madame, it shows that the marriage took place in England. That is something, and do you know what her name was before she was married?"

"You will find that on the register of the child's birth. I did not take much notice, and only signed as being present at the birth, but you will certainly find it there."

"Perhaps the young lady herself may know more when you have broken to her the news of her father's death. Will you ask her if in his talk with her he ever mentioned where his marriage took place, or told her anything about her mother. I will go down now and take a copy of the register of her birth. I shall if possible return to England to-morrow, and will come up in the morning to learn whether you have obtained any information from the young lady upon the subject."

"I do not think her father ever spoke to her about her mother, monsieur; he was a hard selfish man and cared only for his own comfort. To me he always said that he was waiting for his father's death to acknowledge the child. Is his father alive?"

"He is not, madame; he died some ten years ago."

"But this man was a *scelerat* and infame," Madame Duport said passionately; "he was a poltroon; he had no love for his child, no real love, mind you—if he had would he not have made a will even if he had been so *lâche* that he dared not take her home and acknowledge her. What can you say for this man, monsieur?"

Mr. Ferris did not feel called upon to defend his dead client. "I fear that what you say is true, madame; he has certainly acted a very dirty part. If the child is legitimate he ought to have acknowledged her; if not, the least he could have done would be to have made an ample provision for her in case anything happened to himself."

"He said he was going to acknowledge her," Madame Duport said. "The last time he was here he told her that he should take her away the next time he came, to be the mistress of his house."

"Did he say so before you, madame?" James Ferris asked quickly, "or was it only said to her?"

"It was said to her," Madame Duport replied, "when they were in the garden together the last evening. She told me after he had gone next day."

"That is unfortunate; it would have been a material piece of evidence if he had said to her in your presence that he intended to take her home shortly and instal her at the head of his house. Not absolutely conclusive, but still a valuable piece of evidence. And now I do not know that I have any more to say to-day. Please find out as

much as you can for me before to-morrow, as to what she knows of her mother."

So saying James Ferris took his leave.

what she

CHAPTER IV.

As soon as the door had closed behind the young lawyer, Madame Duport burst into tears, and was sobbing hysterically, when her husband returned after seeing James Ferris out into the road.

"Why should you cry, Annette?" he asked, after in vain attempting to soothe her, "it does not seem to me so very bad, the young man spoke kindly, and has evidently a good heart."

"Of what good is a good heart?" Annette asked scornfully. "It has all happened just as I always feared. I believe in the marriage; you believe in the marriage because I do, but what does that amount to? Nothing. Of course this young man spoke smoothly, it is part of his business, why should he not, it cost him nothing. I believe, but what is the good of my belief? in law it goes for next to nothing, it would not weigh a feather in the balance," and she blew an imaginary feather from the palm of her hand. "What is the word of a woman against all these circumstances, this long concealment, the fact that he did not even trouble to make a will to save this child from the workhouse! Oh, these men, they are wretches; and this man—you know what I always thought of him. I wish I had known the last time he was here. I would have beaten him. I would have knocked off and trod upon that hat that was always so glossy. I would have shaken him by that cravat that was always tied so carefully. I would have let him know that it is not enough to be rich if you are also selfish and heartless."

"But he is dead, Annette, it is not right so to speak."

"It is well for him that he is dead," Madame Duport said savagely. "If I had known it when he was alive I would have myself crossed to England, and would have met him in the streets and told him before all what he was. Had I but known that his father was dead, I would not have waited an hour, I would have forced him to do justice

to his child—but there, I am forgetting, I have to go to her and tell her."

"You will not speak ill of him before her," M. Duport said, laying his hand on his wife's arm.

"What do you think of me, Victor Duport? Do you think I would say one word to hurt her? It will be hard; I shall have to clench my hands and bite my tongue when I hear her cry for the *scelerat*. I shall feel like a martyr at the stake, but when I tell her all I shall say no word of blame. Her misfortunes are hard enough for her to bear. I shall remind her that he was coming across to do justice to her in a few days, and that it was only death that stepped in to prevent it. I shall tremble all over when I say these things, but I shall say them. Now, it is long past your time to be going. You must invent some excuse as you go down the hill, for you have missed one of your lessons. Take your hat, make haste, and go."

"What is it, Annette?" Constance Corbyn asked as she caught sight of Madame Duport's face as she entered the room. "You have bad news of some sort. I felt that it was so before I saw you. I was sure that this long talk with this English lawyer has been something painful. Do not be afraid of telling me, I have felt for years that there was some secret concerning me that would come to light some day. It has all been so strange and unnatural."

"There is nothing unnatural about this, my child. It is the most natural of all things, though sometimes it comes to us, as it comes now, very suddenly. Your father has met with a bad accident, he was terribly injured," and she paused.

"He is dead!"

"Yes, my lamb, God has willed it so. You are an orphan now, indeed."

The girl turned pale, her lips quivered.

"It seems to me that I have been that always; but, no, it is ungrateful to say so, Annette. You and Monsieur Duport have been my real parents. You have always been good to me," and she threw her arms round Annette's neck, and burst into tears.

Madame Duport allowed her to cry without check, stroking her hair and tenderly patting her shoulder.

"Now, *ma chère*, sit down and let us talk over this terrible loss you have suffered."

"I am not a hypocrite, Annette, I have not been crying over my father's death, I have been crying because I am shaken. Why should I cry, when he never loved me, not one bit? He was kind when he came here—as he would have been to a dog or a plaything—but that is not love. Do you think he would have left me here all these years if he had really loved me? Do you think I do not know, when I have thought it over so often and often, that my existence was a burden to him? It was a reminder of what he would have been glad to forget; it was an obstacle to a fresh marriage. I am sorry for his death, but not sorry as I should be for a real father. What else is there to tell, Annette? It cannot have taken all this time merely to tell you that he was dead. Are they going to take me away?" she asked, in a quicker voice and with a look of terror in her eyes. "You would not let them do that. No one but my father can have a right to take me away from you."

"No, no, my child: there is no talk of that, no word has been said about it. The talk was," and she hesitated, "was about legal matters connected with your father's marriage."

"Let me hear all about it," the girl said, quietly. "I must know sooner or later, so it is better that I should hear at once."

"Well, dearie, this is how it is. Of course, no one but your father knew about your existence, but when this gentleman, who came here, and your father's nephew were searching among his papers for a will, they came upon a packet of your letters. So Mr. Ferris came over here to learn all particulars necessary for you to get the estates; and, of course, in the first place, they want to know whether your father and mother were married. They thought, perhaps, that you or I might have some documents connected with it. We have only to find that out for you to come into the estates without any trouble."

Constance sat for some minutes without speaking. "If they do not find out where they were married, what then?"

"Oh, but we shall find out," Annette said confidently, "there is no doubt we shall find out, although it may take some time and trouble."

"But if we cannot find out?" the girl persisted.

"Well, if we cannot find out," Annette admitted reluctantly, "I suppose the next heir will take the property."

"I am not thinking of the property," Constance said. "Would they say, if we could not find out where this marriage took place, that my mother was never married, that she was bad woman?"

"I am afraid that that is what they would say, my dear."

"They shall never say so, Annette, never. If I have to go to every church in England I will never rest till I find the proof of the marriage. I do not want the property, they are welcome to it, but I will not have shame thrown on my dead mother's name. You have told me how good she was. When I asked you, when they whispered lies at school, if she had told you that she was married; you said that she had told you so, and that you were sure it was true."

"That is quite true, child. I have always felt as certain as if I had had the proof in my hand that your mother was married."

"Then we will prove it. You will help me?" and she paused. "I will do it if I have to beg my bread all through England."

"We shall succeed somehow," Annette said soothingly. "There are other ways of us finding it. This lawyer has been speaking of them; he says that if we get a clue as to the part of England in which the marriage took place, it would not be difficult to trace it. Besides we could advertise, offer a reward; I know that marriages are often found out in that way. He asked me if your mother had ever spoken to me of the place at which she was married, or said whether it was in town or in the country or by the sea-side; but she never did. Then he asked me to ask you if your father had ever said anything to you that would in any way afford a clue."

Constance shook her head decidedly. "He never spoke to me of my mother, never once; it was as if he was ashamed of her or perhaps ashamed of himself. This lawyer—is he friendly, is he to be trusted, does he come as a friend or enemy, do you think?"

"I think he is to be trusted," Madame Duport replied; "he said that his firm are the family lawyers, and only

wanted to find out who was the legal heir of the property, and he said that the nephew who was with him when your letters were found would offer no opposition whatever if the legal proof of your being the rightful heir were obtained."

"There is not much generosity in that, Annette."

"Well, I don't know, my dear; I have heard that law is very expensive in England, and that rich people can go from court to court and run up expenses till they weary out poor suitors and force them to come to their terms. So perhaps there is more generosity in what he said than you think."

"Is this lawyer coming again?"

"He is coming to-morrow morning to hear whether you know anything that will help us."

"I will see him myself, Annette. You see we cannot be too careful. If I did know anything I would not tell till I felt sure of him, for he might carry the news to those interested in preventing our search from succeeding. Now do you go about your work, Annette, and leave me to think."

In the dusk of the evening Monsieur Duport came back. "How is she, and how does she bear it?" he asked as he ran into the little salon where his wife was laying the things for dinner.

"She bears it well, Victor."

"Have you told her?"

"Yes, she knows that unless the marriage can be proved she will lose everything. She has been sitting by herself for the last two hours in the next room. She said she wanted to think, and I thought it better to leave her to herself. Let us go in now. You see I have finished."

"Ah, my pauvre Mignonne," he said as the girl ran forward when he entered and threw her arms round his neck, "crying by yourself in the firelight. You must not cry, dear. You have us, you know."

"I have not been crying long," she replied. "I have been crying because suddenly I remembered how ungrateful and selfish I was, how different from Annette. Till then I had only thought how this affected me. I never thought how it would affect you both. Of course, it will make such a difference to you."

"Pooh, pooh, little one, we shall do very well. I have many pupils for my teaching, and we have money saved

up, and if needs be we can let our rooms again. The thought never entered our heads, did it, wife?"

"Not once, Victor," Annette replied. "Why we have the house and your earnings and near twenty-five thousand francs laid by. We are rich people, child. You have been a daughter to us, and we no more want to be paid for keeping you than we should if you had been our own. I never heard of such folly. Now I cannot have you crying again. Dinner will be ready in five minutes, and you have just time to run upstairs and dry your wet cheeks and smooth your hair."

The next morning James Ferris was ushered into the room in which Madame Duport and Constance were sitting. "This is Miss Corbyn, Mr. Ferris. She said that she should prefer seeing you herself."

James Ferris saw before him a slight, young figure dressed in plain black, and a fair, young face with large, earnest eyes that seemed to be reading him through and through. "It is a beastly shame," he thought to himself as he bowed, "the girl might be a young princess." Constance commenced the conversation.

"Madame Duport has been telling me that it is necessary that we should obtain the proofs of my mother's marriage."

"Yes," James Ferris replied, trying to treat the thing from a strictly business point of view, "that is the usual course in these cases."

"Madame Duport has also been telling me that you wish to know whether my father had, in his conversations with me, ever said anything that would serve as a clue to the church in which he was married to my mother. No, he never spoke of her during any of the yearly visits he paid me. I suppose he was ashamed to do so."

"And well he might be," James Ferris muttered to himself; but he only said aloud, "No? That is of course a little unfortunate, and we must set about the matter in some other way."

"In what other way, Mr. Ferris?"

"Well," James said airily, "we must begin by advertising. You see clerks in churches keep on the look-out for advertisements of this sort; and when they see them they search the registers."

"But supposing that even this does not succeed, Mr. Ferris?"

"Well in that case," he said doubtfully, "we must try—we must try other measures."

"For example?"

"Well, we must endeavor," James Ferris said after a pause, "to trace where Mr. Corbyn was staying at the time when this marriage took place. I have ascertained your mother's maiden name and shall of course endeavor to find out where she came from, and gain information there. At any rate I can assure you, Miss Corbyn, that my father and I will leave no stone unturned to get at the bottom of the matter."

"You believe that there was a marriage?"

James Ferris was taken aback at the question. Certainly he had not believed that there had been a marriage—in fact his conviction had been very strong the other way, and nothing that he had discovered at St. Malo had occurred to shake it. He paused before answering.

"Excuse me, Miss Corbyn, but it is not the business of us lawyers to believe anything or to take anything for granted; it is simply to establish things by legal proofs."

"But you have an opinion or belief, Mr. Ferris."

"I have nothing whatever upon which to found an opinion, Miss Corbyn. You must remember that all I know of the matter is that I find your letters in which you call Mr. Corbyn father. I have Madame Duport's assurance that your mother told her that she was married, and that she firmly believes it. I have your father's statement to the same effect in the official register of your birth, but I am bound to say that this does not weigh with me in the slightest. Any man under the same circumstances would make the same declaration. Madame Duport's assertion, and her belief that your mother spoke the truth, is in fact the sole evidence, if I may call it evidence, that we have at present in favor of the marriage having taken place. Now, you must remember that I am a stranger to the circumstances. Had I known your mother, doubtless I should have formed an opinion from my knowledge of her, one way or other; as it is I have nothing whatever to go upon excepting knowledge of human nature in general, and to a certain extent of that of Mr. Corbyn in particular."

"You will excuse my pressing you, Mr. Ferris," Constance said quietly, "but it seems to me that it is essential in a case like this when there must be a long search, that

those who make it should be quite convinced that they have right on their side, otherwise they would soon abandon it. Will you kindly tell me then what your knowledge of human nature in general, and that of my father in particular, as you say, leads you to think."

"If you wish me to speak frankly, I will, Miss Corbyn. Taking the circumstances into consideration, and the silence and secrecy which enveloped the whole transaction, I should have said that probabilities were vastly in favor of there having been no marriage. Taking this case specially into consideration with reference to Mr. Corbyn's character—you wish me to speak frankly?" She bent her head. "I should say that two of the traits of Mr. Corbyn's character, a certain pride of family and regard for his own ease and comfort, tell both ways. They would in the first case certainly tell against a private marriage, and the trials and consequences it would entail. Upon the other hand, they would influence him did he once make such a marriage to keep it concealed as long as possible in order to avoid a scandal and talk that would arise when it became known.

"Now as to this search you speak of, I wish again to speak perfectly frankly. We are, as I have told you, solicitors to the family, and the connection has lasted nearly a hundred years. When I made the discovery of your letters I was with Mr. Clitheroe, who up to that time was regarded as the undoubted heir to the estate. It was at his wish that I determined at once to investigate the matter, and that in a friendly rather than a hostile spirit. So far I have failed to discover any legal proof whatever of a marriage having taken place. Had I done so it would have been my own wish, as well as that of Mr. Clitheroe, to use my best endeavors to place you in the position to which you would be entitled. Unhappily I have not done so, and therefore you see our firm, that is to say, my father and myself, for I am a very junior partner in it, must naturally revert to our position as solicitors to Mr. Clitheroe.

"I have been thinking over the matter ever since I was here yesterday, and it does not seem to me that we can possibly act on behalf of what I may call antagonistic interests. Not that Mr. Clitheroe regards you as an antagonist, or that you would, if you knew him, so regard him, but your interests are nevertheless antagonistic, and there-

fore it would be better for you to place yourself in the hands of someone who would be perfectly free to act. If, as is probable, you have no legal acquaintances in London, I shall be happy to introduce you to a friend of mine in whom you could, I am sure, place implicit confidence. He is not like myself a solicitor but a barrister, and as he has as yet little professional work, he would be able to devote more of his personal time to the matter than would be possible in the case of very busy men like my father and myself.

"There is one thing more which it is my duty to say, and this, now that I have seen you, is the most delicate part of my mission. Mr. Clitheroe desired me to assure you that, in any case, he should wish to carry out what would, of course, have been Mr. Corbyn's intention, had he not been accidentally cut off without making a will. He has, therefore, commissioned me to say that such arrangements shall be made for your future as would naturally have been made by Mr. Corbyn had he made a will. One moment," he said, holding up his hand as he saw by the girl's face that she was about to utter an indignant refusal, "pray do not reply to this proposal at present. All this has come upon you as a terrible shock, and I can well understand that your impulse is to refuse to accept what you regard as rightfully yours at the hands of one who is, as you consider, a usurper of your inheritance. But in time, perhaps, other thoughts may prevail. Mr. Clitheroe is not, at any rate, a willing usurper. He is a high-minded and noble young fellow, and would not for an instant occupy a position that was not legally his.

"As matters stand he has no choice but to enter upon possession of the estates until proof is adduced that he is not the rightful owner. The estates are entailed, which is a term meaning that they pass to the next heir, and cannot be left by a will, or alienated. In most cases entailed estates pass only to male heirs, but this is an exception. At Mr. Corbyn's death they would, if he left no children, pass to the next heir whoever he or she might be, and he has no power whatever to divert the succession. Thus whatever his own convictions might be as to your rights he has no power whatever to carry those convictions into effect, and must wait until such legal proof is forthcoming as will establish your claim to the possession of the estates.

I say this so that you should not regard him as a personal rival. Failing proof to the contrary, the law places him in possession of the estate as it would place you there if you established your rights. You must remember he has all his life been brought up to regard himself as the unquestioned heir to this property, and I am quite sure, Miss Corbyn, that if you establish yourself to be so you will feel as kindly and generously disposed towards him as he does at the present moment towards you."

"Thank you, sir," Constance said quietly, when he had finished. "Yes, I had not seen it before in the light that you now put it. I am sorry for this gentleman, and believe me that were it a matter of the estates alone, you would hear no more of me. I am very happy and contented in the love and care of those who have given me the only love and care I have ever received. I have not the slightest wish to leave them to go among strangers, or to find myself possessed of estates, but I have the honor and the memory of my dead mother to clear, and please God I will do so however long it may take me. It will be time enough when I acknowledge that I have lost all hope of success to speak about Mr. Clitheroe's offer. As to your own, I accept it thankfully; will you kindly give me the name and address of the gentleman you speak of, and will you mention my case to him in order that when I call upon him he may be ready to take it up?"

James Ferris took out his card case, wrote a name and address under his own, handed the card to her and then rose.

"Good-bye, Miss Corbyn; I hope that you will believe that you have a friend in me, and that any assistance and advice I can give you, apart from the interest of my client, will be always at your service. Monsieur and Madame Duport, allow me to assure you of my feeling of esteem at your conduct and kindness towards Miss Corbyn."

As James Ferris walked down the hill to his hotel he said to himself. "By Jove, if that girl's mother was at all like her, I don't blame Madame Duport for believing her when she said she was married. I should have believed her myself. The girl is as truthful as the day, I would swear, and she has any amount of pluck. If I thought there were anything to be found out, I should feel uncomfortable about Philip's chances."

"But you were *magnifique*, Constance," Annette Duport exclaimed, throwing her arms round the girl when the door closed upon James Ferris, "who could have thought it of you; and I, who have regarded you as a child. It was grand, Victor, was it not," as her husband returned from seeing their visitor out; "this child of ours was noble: *pauvre petite*."

"I kiss her hand," the little Frenchman said, suiting the action to the word.

"Then it is very foolish of you, Monsieur Duport," the girl said, with a gleam of laughter in her eyes, when you can kiss my face whenever you have a mind to." Then she went on more gravely, "but it is a hard task that I have undertaken, and I do not yet see my way, and I shall have to leave you," and tears sprang into her eyes.

It was not often that Madame Duport consulted her husband before making a decision, but this time she did so by a look. He nodded, and she said, "You do not think, *ma mignonne*, that Victor and I are going to let you go to England to wander about by yourself; it would be ridiculous, it would be improper, it would be impossible. Young ladies can do things there that they cannot do here, but this could not be. I shall, of course, accompany you to England. Victor must remain here and teach, and Jeanne will look after him while I am away. Why you would be lost in London by yourself; you would be robbed; you would be a child in their hands; how could you get on by yourself; how are you going to live, think you, in this England; and the lawyers, do you suppose that they are going to work for nothing?"

"No, Annette, I cannot let you. You are too good," Constance said, her tears flowing freely now. "I could not have such a sacrifice."

"*Tais toi, petite imbecile*," Annette said, pinching her cheek, "it must be as I say."

"But indeed, I should do very well," the girl urged falteringly. "I have thought it all over. I have my watch and other things to sell, and I thought I might be able to get some pupils to teach French and music to for four or five hours a day, which would leave me time to go about to the churches and look at the books."

"Ah, you do not know London," Annette said. "It is huge, a stranger is lost in it. It is a world in itself. There

are thousands of churches ; it would take you years to make one visit to each : and as for pupils, Victor will tell you how hard it is to obtain them. He knew scores of his compatriots ready to teach, but who could scarcely keep body and soul together on their earnings."

"I had thought about the lawyer's expenses," Constance went on, "but I thought that perhaps it would be arranged that they should be paid when we have succeeded."

"It must be as Annette wishes," Monsieur Duport said firmly. "I shall do very well without her for a time. She will keep the bank ; of what use are our savings if not to help our child ? If you succeed you shall pay us back with great, great interest ; if you do not, what are we the worse ? You will come back here with her, and you too, if you like, can then teach English, and music, and dancing, and we shall soon fill up the cash box again. Pooh ! I will have nothing said against it ; it is fixed, it is definite ; let us talk of other matters. Ah, Jeanne is taking in breakfast. It is well ; I am as hungry as one hunter : *allons*." And so it was settled, and although Constance protested, she felt a deep sense of rest and comfort at the thought that she should have Annette with her, and had not to set out on this quest alone and friendless.

"Well, James, what success ?" Mr. Ferris asked his son as he came into the office next morning.

"No success, sir. They have no documents of any description. Nothing beyond the bare word of the mother, who died in childbed, that she was ever married, except, of course, the official registration of the child's birth, in which the parents are described as married ; but that, naturally, goes for nothing."

"Nothing whatever, James. Then there is an end to the business. I suppose that you have made an arrangement for an allowance and settlement ? You did not suffer yourself and Clitheroe to be imposed upon, I hope ?"

"I don't know that we have quite heard the end of it," the son said drily. "The young lady intends to undertake a search for the register of her mother's marriage. As to an allowance, she will hear nothing on the subject until she has given up all hope of success."

"Well, that will not be long," his father said confidently, "for I consider it is morally certain that no such register exists ; and in the second place, if it did exist the betting

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would be a hundred to one against her finding it—ay, a thousand to one. What is the girl like, and what are her surroundings?"

"She is a lady all over, father; carries herself well, with a little of the haughtiness of Mrs. Clitheroe; only she is graceful with it, and the old woman is not."

"Mrs. Clitheroe is my junior by ten years, James, you will please to remember."

"I beg your pardon, father. No one would think of calling you old; but Mrs. Clitheroe's stiffness and stateliness have always impressed me with the idea of her being very far off in point of age, as in everything else. Well, this girl is very English, in spite of her having been brought up abroad, and speaks with the slightest possible accent. The people that she has been brought up by both speak English well. This, and I suppose her reading, accounts for it."

"Is she pretty, James?" Mr. Ferris asked, looking at his son fixedly. "I knew it was a mistake sending you over when there was a girl in question."

"It is a striking face," James said quietly. "In another year I should say it would be a beautiful one; it is a face that is at once tender and resolute."

"Mrs. Clitheroe is resolute enough," Mr. Ferris said drily, "but the element of tenderness is absent."

"Very much so," his son assented. "Yes, I should say equally resolute, but not in the same way. Mrs. Clitheroe has thin lips, tightly pressed together; this girl's lips are full and firm, but I think that there is a similarity in the squareness of their chins."

"You seem to have watched her pretty closely, James. I hope you have not been making a fool of yourself in any way."

"I hope not, sir," the son replied, beginning to open the pile of letters on his desk. "I think I have followed my instructions precisely."

"And you still believe," Mr. Ferris said sharply, "that there has been no marriage?"

"Yes, sir," James said, slowly. "I still think that there has been no marriage."

Among the letters James Ferris opened was one from Philip Clitheroe, saying that he should be at the Golden Cross Hotel for the next four days, and would be glad if

he would look in when he returned, and tell him any news he had to give him as to the matter at St. Malo. At lunch time James Ferris said to his father that he would take a cab and drive down to see Philip, who would be returning to Bath the next day.

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CHAPTER V.

IN THE TEMPLE.

PHILIP CLITHEROE was in when James Ferris arrived.

"That is right," he said, as the young lawyer entered the coffee-room, where he was at lunch, "I was afraid you would not get back before I left. I called at your office yesterday, and your father told me that you had yourself gone over to St. Malo. It was awfully good of you. Sit down and have some lunch, and then you can tell me about it. There is nobody near enough to overhear us."

"There is not much to tell," Ferris said as he sat down. "As I anticipated, I found that they had no documents whatever—nothing that would afford the slightest clue as to the past."

Philip gave a little sigh of relief. He was willing and anxious to do everything that was fair and right; but the more he thought over it, the more he concluded that the loss of the inheritance would be a serious matter to him.

"Then is it all over?" he asked. "Did you arrange that other matter for me—about her allowance, and so on?"

"Well, no. Of course, I mentioned it; but naturally, at present they are not inclined to accept the fact that no marriage took place. They have nothing whatever to work upon, except the word of the mother. She said that she was married, and they are convinced that she was so. The daughter believes it passionately, and intends to devote herself to the search for the register of marriage. Not so much, she says, for the sake of the inheritance, but for the honor of her dead mother. Till she gives up that search as hopeless, she will accept nothing from you; and, unless I am greatly mistaken, Philip, it will be a long time before that event occurs."

"I am awfully sorry," Philip Clitheroe said, "awfully sorry. Marriage or no marriage, she is my uncle's daugh-

ter, and has a fair right to his unentailed property ; it is a horribly nasty thing to feel that you are wronging a woman."

"Well, you cannot call it wronging," James Ferris remonstrated. "She has no legal rights in the matter."

"But she has natural rights, Ferris. We may take it as certain that however my uncle acted towards her mother and herself, he would, had he left a will, have provided for her amply. His sudden death prevented that, and she must let me set this matter right, or her friends must for her, which comes to the same thing. What sort of a girl is she ?" he asked.

"She is a lady, English in appearance ; the people who brought her up have taken every pains with her ; both speak English well, the woman, Madame Duport, is a Jersey woman who has lived a long time in England ; and her husband was a teacher of French in London and is now a professor of English. They have had, I fancy, a handsome allowance with her ; anyhow she has been at a good school. She carries herself well, and in another year will be remarkably good looking, in a quiet style ; she has soft eyes, an honest, earnest expression, and a resolute mouth. If I thought there was a register of this marriage in existence I should say that she is just the woman to find it."

"Confound it," Philip said, irritably, "you make one feel a bigger rogue than one did before. If it had been a flighty little French woman one would not have minded it so much, but being a girl such as you describe, it seems horrible. I only want to do what is right, you know, and upon my word I will help her in any way I can to prove her rights."

"If she has rights, I do not doubt you would," James Ferris said. "I can assure you that if I had not been situated as I am, I should have felt inclined to place myself at her service, although I am sure that nothing but disappointment can come of it. Being, of course, in opposition, as solicitor to the estate, that is out of the question. However, as I did not wish her to fall into bad hands, who would swallow up any little money she may have, and do nothing, I have recommended her to go to a friend of mine, Robert Harbut, who will certainly give her good advice and see at any rate that she is not swindled."

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"I would give a very large share of the property to put things right," Philip said. "However, as far as I can see there is nothing to be done at present."

"There is one point upon which you may possibly be able to give me some information."

"What is it?"

"The name of the girl's mother was Constance Purcell, do you know any such name in your part of the country?"

"No," Philip said, "but it is possible there may be such a name among the farmers or people within a few miles of the Court."

"I think that it would be as well for you to make inquiries, Philip. Of course, we do not know that she came from that part of the country, still it is likely enough, and if one did but know their position in life, the character she bore and the reports that were current when she went away some eighteen years ago, it might turn out useful. I should say that is the point at which they will begin to look for a clue. At any rate that is where I should look myself if I had the matter in hand."

"I will make a point of doing so," Philip replied. "I will just note the name down in my pocket-book, for I never can remember a name for five minutes. I suppose you still think I had better keep the matter from my mother?"

"I do not see that anything is to be gained by telling her, it would naturally be a great worry to her, and unless the girl is successful in her search, which, as I have told you over and over again, I consider to be unlikely in the extreme, there is no reason why she should ever hear."

"I am glad you think so, Ferris. It is bad enough having to bear such a bit of business on one's own shoulder, but you who know my mother will understand that it would be still more heavy if she knew it. You know her ideas about the family, and I do not think she would see this thing in the same light that I do."

"No, I should think not," young Ferris said drily. "I should say that even when the search is given up, and you are able to persuade the girl to accept a settlement, the matter had much better be kept entirely among ourselves."

A week later Constance Corbyn and Madame Duport arrived in London, and took modest lodgings in Pimlico. The first two days after their arrival were devoted to sight-seeing, Madame Duport taking great pride in her

knowledge of the capital. She took Constance long journeys in omnibuses, her object being chiefly for the girl to see the magnitude of the task she had undertaken, which, although she had said no word to discourage her, Madame Duport in her secret heart believed to be absolutely hopeless.

Constance was not discouraged, although she certainly felt, far more than she had done before, the enormous difficulties of her search. She had heard of London as a great city, and knew that it was many times as large as St. Malo, but until she saw it she had been unable to form even a remote idea of its immensity.

"It is enormous, it is oppressive, Annette," she said when, on the evening of the second day, they returned to their lodgings, "that view from the top of St. Paul's made my heart sink for a minute as I looked at that wilderness of houses stretching away everywhere as far as I could see, and the steeples and towers were countless.

"However, the sooner one begins, you know, the sooner one will get it done. To-morrow morning we will go to this Mr. Harbut and learn from him what is the best way of setting about it; he lives in the Temple. What a funny name for a street."

"It is not a street, Constance; it is a collection of narrow lanes, with a big square or two, and all the houses are full of lawyers."

"It does not seem a pleasant idea," the girl said, with a little shudder; "it is something like one reads in the book of fairy tales of entering a castle full of ogres."

"But you did not think Monsieur Ferris an ogre, *ma petite*."

"No, he was nice, and not a bit like the lawyers one reads of in books."

"I do not suppose Mr. Harbut will be like them either, for Mr. Ferris spoke of him as a friend and as a young man. Well, we shall see to-morrow."

"What a curious place," Constance said, as they climbed to the third floor of a house in Pump Court. "What curious old stairs, and these black doors with the names over them. Well, here we are, there is his name and another name too. Are they partners I wonder?"

Madame Duport shook her head, her knowledge of London did not extend to the Temple and its ways.

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"We shall soon see," she said, and taking the knocker she executed a knock similar to that which she was accustomed to hear on her mistress' door. A lad of about sixteen, with his hair cut very short, and his eyes opened in astonishment at the nature of the summons, appeared at the door. Such a knock had never been heard before on the third story of Pump Court.

"Mr. Harbut lives here, does he not?" Madame Duport said.

"Well, these are his chambers," the boy said. "As to his living here he may or he may not. I should say that you had better ask him about that when you see him. I hardly know myself. You take a fellow's breath away knocking like that."

"It is the knock a lady always gives," Madame Duport said sternly, while Constance, who had herself been startled at the portentous length and variety of her companion's knock, could not help smiling.

"Is Mr. Harbut in at present?" she asked.

"Yes, miss, at least I will see if he is in," the lad said more respectfully as he looked at her for the first time, his eyes having before only been on Madame Duport, whom he recognized as being a foreigner. "What name shall I say?"

"Madame Duport and Miss Corbyn."

"It is curious the boy not knowing whether Mr. Harbut is in or not," Constance said to Madame Duport as the lad disappeared down a passage, leaving the door open.

"It seems a small place; how could it be that he does not know whether the gentleman is in?"

"He knows," Madame Duport replied; "that is his way of saying that he doesn't know whether Mr. Harbut will see you or not."

In a moment the lad returned.

"Mr. Harbut will see you; please to walk in."

His manner was much more respectful than before, but Constance detected a grin of amusement on his face as he led the way up the passage and opened a door. It was a small room uncarpeted, with book shelves all round it, a large writing table, and two chairs—one of which was also piled with books—besides that on which a gentleman was seated at the table. Constance looked at him with an astonishment so great that she paused for a moment at the

door. He was rather a short man with a large pair of spectacles, through which his eyes seemed to stare out. How he was dressed or what he was otherwise like Constance did not at the moment know. Her gaze was rivetted on his head. Never in her life had she seen such extraordinary hair. To begin with, it was almost white; on the top it seemed to stand straight up, and then there were four regular stiff curls that went right round the head. As he rose she saw there were two little stiff pigtailed down the back, and a black patch in the very centre of the scalp. A moment later she perceived that this extraordinary head-gear was a wig, and that it was considerably awry. Surely this must be a madman. No one in his senses could wear such an astonishing wig. She glanced nervously at Madame Dupont, but saw to her surprise that she was unmoved at the spectacle.

"I am glad to see you, ladies," he said, in a short and business-like manner, "pray sit down. Oh, there is nowhere to sit I see, please take this chair," and he pushed the one on which he had been sitting towards Constance. "I don't often have two visitors together," he went on. "Ferris has told me all about your case; glad to do anything I can to help you. Not very busy, you see, worse luck, now; let me hear your ideas," and tumbling the books off the third chair with a crash on to the floor, he again seated himself behind the table, dipped a pen into the ink and prepared to take notes. "One moment, if you will excuse me," he said, touching a bell upon the table. Then the clerk entered and received some orders as to papers that had to be taken over to a solicitor. The lad then stepped up to Mr. Harbut and whispered something in his ear.

"Wig!" the latter exclaimed in surprise, "bless me I had quite forgotten I had it on. I was just going to the court when you were announced, Madame Dupont, and put my wig on you see, and had just taken up my gown. I threw that down and forgot all about the wig," and he removed the article that had excited such surprise in the mind of Constance Corbyn, and after looking round and seeing no place available for it, threw it into the waste paper basket. He then took off his spectacles and laid them on the table beside him. Constance now perceived that this wig formed a portion of a legal outfit, and was

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relieved from the apprehension that she had at first entertained as to the sanity of the gentleman upon whose advice she would have so much to depend. He now appeared to her a young, indeed a rather boyish, looking personage, with short cut but rather wavy hair on his head, and a smooth face characterized by an expression of fun and humor.

"Let me see. Yes, this is the outline of the case my friend, James Ferris, has given me. 'Mr. and Mrs. Corbyn arrived at St. Malo in September, 1850, took up abode at Madame Duport's; two months' later daughter Constance was born. Registered at Mairie as daughter of Algernon Corbyn and Constance Corbyn, *née* Constance Purcell. Mother died a few days after birth of child. Mr. Corbyn left daughter in charge of Madame Duport; was in the habit of coming over once a year to see her. Made allowance for her maintenance and education. Upon no occasion spoke to her about her mother. Upon the occasion of last visit said that he should probably when he next came take her away and place her at the head of his establishment. No papers or documents of any kind in the possession of Madame Duport or Miss Corbyn. Madame Duport states that in conversation with Constance Corbyn, senior, that lady alluded to her marriage, and Madame Duport is convinced that such marriage had taken place.'

"Now those are the notes, Miss Corbyn, that I took when my friend, James Ferris, told me the story. Now before you begin I wish to tell you that my position in this case is irregular. The legal profession of this country is divided into two parts: the one consists of solicitors, whose business it is, among other things, to work up cases, investigate deeds, and so on; they submit these cases for the opinion of men belonging to the other branch of the profession, who are called counsel or barristers. They take the case as handed to them by the solicitor, get up precedents, and argue the case in court; they only work, you see, when set in motion by the solicitors, and it is entirely opposed to the etiquette of the profession that they should be in direct communication with their clients. Thus if I am to do anything to help you in this matter, which I can assure you I desire to do, partly because I feel flattered that Ferris has had the acumen to select me for the business; secondly, because I regard it as an extremely interesting

case ; and in the third place, if you will permit me to say so, because now that I have the pleasure of seeing you, Miss Corbyn, I feel that we shall work satisfactorily together."

"That is French, rather than English, is it not?" Constance asked, with a little smile.

"Well, yes, I suppose it is, Miss Corbyn, but it occurred to me at the time, and I generally say what I think. The pith of what I am getting to is this. You see, according to the rules of my profession, this is not the business that a barrister can undertake for a client, and therefore if you, after thinking the matter over, agree to put it in my hands rather than those of a solicitor, it is absolutely necessary that you should not stand in the position of a client but of a friend. Do you understand?"

"But do you mean, sir," Constance said, after a pause, "that you are to"—and she hesitated—"receive no payment for your professional services?"

"That is exactly what I mean, Miss Corbyn," Mr. Harbut replied, briskly. "You see I could not take payment for such work ; it would be unprofessional altogether. I might be complained of, disbarred, and suffer all sorts of hideous penalties for unprofessional conduct."

"I don't see," the girl began, "that we could anyhow——" and she looked appealingly at Madame Duport.

"But we have funds to meet all expenses, monsieur," Annette said ; "we have come to England prepared to spend money."

"No doubt, and you will have to spend money, and that pretty freely, before you have done, madame," Robert Harbut replied. "You will want every halfpenny you have got, you can take my word for it. Of course, if you would rather go to a solicitor and spend on him a good slice of the money that might be much more usefully spent in other directions you can do so, but in that case I am bound to say that I consider the very high opinion that Ferris expressed to me of Miss Corbyn's good sense will be by no means justified."

"But I do not see how we could possibly accept such a service at the hands of a stranger," Constance said, hesitatingly.

"Well, I shall be disappointed if you do not, Miss Corbyn. Ferris knows that so far the solicitors of this

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metropolis are not impressed as they might be with my talents, and therefore leave me so severely alone in the matter of briefs that I have plenty of spare time on my hands. In the second place he knew that I rather pride myself on seeing further into a stone wall than other people, and that it would be a matter of great interest and pleasure to me to aid you in ferreting out this case. I can assure you that I have no ulterior views, that I shall neither delude you into signing a bond in my favor, or shall expect you, in the event of your recovering your property, to reward me with your hand, being, in fact, otherwise engaged," and he broke into a merry laugh, in which Constance joined.

"Well, madame, what do you think? It seems to me that it would be foolish to refuse this extremely kind offer which Mr. Harbut is good enough to make us."

"It is for you to decide, my dear," Annette said, cautiously. "You know I only came over here to take care of you, it is your expedition altogether."

"Well, then, I accept, sir," Constance said, "and feel very grateful to you for your kindness."

"That is settled then. Now let us go straight to business. You have nothing to add to what Ferris has told me?"

"Nothing: that is as far as I can see the exact state of the case."

"Well, I have, of course, been thinking it over since Ferris told me the story, and perceive that it is a difficult task that is before us."

"Is it wrong for me to ask what you really think of my chances, Mr. Harbut?"

"As we are working as friends, Miss Corbyn, you can ask exactly what you please, and I will answer to the best of my power. I believe that Ferris told you frankly that he did not think that there had been a marriage; in fact, that he is of opinion that the chances are very strong indeed against it. Now I admit at once that as he had the advantage of some knowledge of Mr. Corbyn's character, while I only know by what he has told me about it, his opinion in the matter is of more value than my own; but on thinking the matter over in every light I am bound to say that I regard the chances as far more favorable than he does, and that I think it more probable than not that there was a marriage."

Constance gave a little exclamation of thankfulness and pleasure. It was an intense satisfaction to her that an

unprejudiced person should see the matter in the same light that she did, and especially that she should not be working with one, who, although ready to give her every assistance, regarded the mission upon which she was engaged as an altogether utopian one. She was not aware that James Ferris had said to his friend, "above all things, Robert, you must lead the girl to believe that you think her claim to be a just one. If you don't she will never listen to your advice, and will end by putting herself into the hands of some shark, who will flatter her up with false hopes and fleece her until her last penny has gone. You would not dissuade her from her search by throwing cold water upon it. You would simply throw her into other hands."

With this Robert Harbut had agreed, but thinking the case over he found that he could, without straining his conscience, take that view of the matter. "Of course the matter turns very much upon Mr. Corbyn's character, and you will excuse me if I pain you in discussing it freely, but it is absolutely necessary to do so to get a fair view of the case."

"I will tell you his character," Madame Duport said. "All these years that I have taken charge of the child, I have watched him, for I liked not this position in which he kept her, although I benefited from it. He was a man who thought himself to be strong, because he was accustomed to have his own way, but who at heart was weak. He was a man who thought of himself and his position more than he did of his daughter. I think he meant well, but he was weak and shrank from sacrifice; he was kind to Constance when he was with her, but that, I think, was not because he loved her, but because his visits were more agreeable to him if she were pleased and gratified than they would have been otherwise."

"Yes, that is about the estimate I formed from what Ferris told me; an easy-going somewhat selfish man, proud of his family, and shrinking from anything like a scandal; especially afraid, I fancy, from what Ferris tells me, of the opinion of his elder sister, a woman with a sharp tongue and passionately fond of her only son, who would be deprived of his position as heir of the Corbyn estates, by the appearance on the scene of a daughter, born in wedlock, of Mr. Corbyn. At the time the alliance—whatever

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it was—was formed, Mr. Corbyn's father was alive and in fact survived until Miss Corbyn was seven years old. Mr. Corbyn, senior, was, I hear, a very proud and imperious man. Whether Mr. Corbyn the younger went through the ceremony of marriage with your mother would have depended so greatly upon her character, Miss Corbyn, that it is impossible for me, not knowing her, to form the slightest opinion myself as to whether there was a marriage or otherwise, but the very strong opinion held by Madame Duport, who had the advantage of knowing her, counts, of course, for a good deal in the matter.

"At any rate, Mr. Corbyn, junior's, conduct with respect to you does not appear to be at all inconsistent with the fact of his marriage. Up to the time of his father's death he would put off declaring his marriage for fear of his father's anger. Had your mother lived he might have brought himself to do so in order to place her in her proper position, but after her death that motive no longer existed. He would have said to himself that you were well cared for and happy, and that there was nothing to be gained by an explanation which would be painful to make. When his father died it was of course open to him to fetch you home and proclaim the marriage; but he was averse to facing the public talk and scandal, the wrath of his sister and other unpleasantness, as long as the evil day could be put off. Before you came of age it was possible—I do not mean that he had at all counted on that—but it was of course possible that you might die, and in that case the necessity for declaring the marriage would be altogether obviated. But I expect that he argued chiefly that it would be better and more pleasant to defer the matter until you were at an age to be presented to society as his heiress, foreseeing that your appearance would go far to make matters easier for him, and would create a far more favorable impression than if he had presented you as a child or as an ungrown girl, with nothing in your favor. The fact that he told you that on his next visit he should take you back and put you at the head of his establishment, would go far in support of this view of the case."

"But surely it quite proves it, Mr. Harbut," Constance broke in, "he could never have placed me at the head of his establishment if—if he had not been married to my mother."

"He certainly could not have placed you at the head of Corbyn Court," Mr. Harbut agreed, "but you see you knew nothing about Corbyn Court nor about his position, and he may only have intended to have taken a house somewhere in London, and established you there, spending a portion of his time with you, but still without introducing you to any of his friends. I do not say for a moment that this was so. I only bring it forward to show that what he said is not necessarily conclusive as to his intention to introduce you publicly as his heiress. You see we must necessarily look at the matter in the light in which our opponents will regard it. Now this is the position. Mr. Corbyn may or may not have married your mother, that is a point we have to prove if we can, but there is at any rate nothing whatever in his conduct to you inconsistent with the fact that he was so married.

"Now, having gone so far, we must see what our first step should be. We have, you see, the maiden name of your mother. I will suppose that the name given in the register is the correct one, because as his own name was given there are no reasons why her's should not also be correct. Now, the first step is to find who she was, where her people lived; whether her parents are still alive, and if so, whether they were parties to her marriage with Mr. Corbyn, and if not, under what circumstances she left them; whether they discovered that she joined Mr. Corbyn in London or elsewhere; in fact learn from them or from any surviving relatives, whether there is any clue as to the locality in which the marriage probably took place. That once established, we can proceed to address circulars to the clerks of every church in that locality, offering a reward for the discovery of the register of the marriage. If that method fails we shall understand that the clue was a false one, and we had better follow it up in some fresh direction. How does that meet your views, Miss Corbyn?"

"Perfectly, sir, that seems to be the very thing. I feel sure that we shall succeed. That seems quite straightforward and easy, does it not, Annette?"

"I think so, my dear. I was ready to stay away here with you as long as you like, but I was sure that you could never do as you talked of and search the books of all the churches in England, it would take many a lifetime, but this seems to give a fair chance of finding out this register that we so want."

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"And where is Corbyn Court, Mr. Harbut, for I suppose it will be somewhere near there that we must search for my mother's family to begin with."

"Corbyn Court lies three or four miles out of Bath, and Bath is about three hours by rail from London. But you must not be too sure of finding the family there. Mr. Corbyn may have met your mother at Oxford—I learn from Ferris that he was at that University—or he may have met her abroad, or when upon a visit to London, or in a railway train or elsewhere. If no clue is to be found to the existence of such a family within, say, fifteen miles of Bath, we must insert some advertisement in the papers saying that the next of kin of Constance Purcell who left her home towards the end of the year of 1849 are requested to reply to me, and they will hear of something to their advantage. We must put that last bit in, you know, because otherwise they might think that perhaps a whole family of Constance Purcells was likely to be thrown on their hands."

"Then we can start for Bath at once and begin, Mr. Harbut."

"Well, I will think that over. Would you mind calling again to-morrow; it is a matter that I should like to consider well before a step is taken, and to sketch out some sort of plan of campaign," and so with renewed expressions of gratitude, Constance and her friend took their leave of Mr. Robert Harbut.

"Well, madame, what do you think, we are in luck, are we not?"

"He is very young," Annette said gravely.

"He can't be as young as he looks. Mr. Ferris spoke of him as his friend, and I suppose that he must be about the same age, though he really looks almost a boy. But he must be very clever. You saw how he had thought it all out, and how he was able to put us in the right way of going to work at once, instead of perhaps wasting years and years searching here, and no good perhaps after all. But didn't he look funny when we went in, I never saw such a thing as he had on his head. Of course, I have seen wigs, lots of them in St. Malo, but never a thing like that. The way it stuck up, and those funny curls and the little tails and the black patch at the top," and Constance burst into a merry laugh that startled the sparrows hopping about in the court, and caused two or three hurrying men to look round in surprise.

"Oh, here is another," she exclaimed a minute later, "just the same sort of wig and with a black gown on. What does it mean?"

"That is the regular dress of barristers in court," Annette said. "I know, because I once went as a witness. One of the footmen stole some silver and he was caught and they tried him and I had to go as a witness, and there were lots of men in court just like that, and two of them asked me questions, and one was very rude and wanted to try and make out that I had been lying. It was shameful, and I almost cried before the people. But shall we go home, Constance?"

"No, I should like to walk about this funny old place for a bit, let us go through this archway. Oh, what a great square and how green the grass is in it, and there is the river. Who would expect to find such a place as this in the middle of this smoky town."

"I dare say that it is very nice in summer, child, but I think it is cold and damp and *triste* at present"

"Nothing seems *triste* to me, Annette. I feel so full of hope and confidence now we have got Mr. Harbut to help us, and he seems so clever and so kind and good-natured—though he is funny and boyish and unlike what I should have thought a lawyer would be—that I don't think anything could look *triste* at present; but never mind, we will go home and sit by the fire and talk it all over."

The next morning they again called at Pump Court, this time Robert Harbut was without his wig, and two chairs were clear ready for them to sit upon.

"I have been thinking matters over, Miss Corbyn," he began, as soon as they were seated, "and I think I shall run down with you for a few days. I want a holiday, and this is a good excuse to take one."

"Oh, but we could not think of troubling you in that sort of way, Mr. Harbut, it would be too much altogether."

"But you see, I do not consider it any trouble, quite the contrary. I regard it as a most interesting outing, and, besides, I think that just at first you are scarcely likely to set about things in the right way. You see I have taken up this matter as a sort of professional exercise, and because I have the detective spirit strong in me."

"But I can assure you that we shall get on very well," Constance persisted.

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"Yes, no doubt ; but just give me an idea as to how you mean to set to work. We will suppose you are established in lodgings or some quiet hotel in Bath. What would be your first move ?"

"Our first move would, of course, be to search," Constance said, stoutly.

"Yes, I quite understand that, but how will you begin your search ? You cannot sally out and ask the first person you meet 'is your name Purcell ?' 'No.' 'Well, do you know anyone of that name living within fifteen miles ?' When you have asked about fifty people these questions, you might not improbably find yourself locked up under suspicion of being a wandering lunatic at large, and, anyhow, you would not be much nearer than you were when you started."

Constance joined in the laugh with which Robert Harbut concluded, but there was a certain ring of vexation in it.

"You must think me very foolish, Mr. Harbut ?"

"Not at all, Miss Corbyn ; upon the contrary, I think you are a very sensible young lady, but still unaccustomed to our ways ; if I have been mistaken, tell me how you propose commencing ?"

"Well, I should begin"—Constance commenced fluently and then stopped, "I should begin by inquiring of the police."

"Well, that is not a bad idea, but the police of a large town would be very unlikely to know anything of the residents in a country village, and with the exception of the names over the shop doors would know very little of those even on their own beat. Now, I should not have thought, Miss Corbyn, that selfishness was a prominent trait in your character, but I see that you want to have this hunt to yourself and to keep me from having any share or interest in it."

Constance again laughed, this time without any sense of vexation. "Very well, Mr. Harbut. After that I can say no more against it, and accept your kind offer to accompany us and give us our first lessons in detective work. When will you be ready to start ?"

"To-morrow morning," he said promptly. "It is no use wasting time ; I have nothing to keep me here, and am honestly longing to get on this trail. You don't know how

sick one gets of going into Court every day and sitting there doing nothing, and what a pleasure it is to have a case that one can throw oneself into and puzzle out for oneself." He touched the bell. "Bring me a Bradshaw," he said when the boy appeared. "Now let me see, Bath, Great Western. Yes, here it is, ten o'clock train, first, second, and third class. We shall travel third class, of course, Miss Corbyn; we do not know how long we are going to be over this business, and must begin by being economical. Can you arrange to meet me at a quarter to ten on the platform at Paddington with your tickets in your hands and no more luggage than is absolutely necessary?"

"How long are we likely to want it for, Mr. Harbut?" Madame Duport asked, speaking for the first time, her instinct as lady's maid coming at once into play.

"I should say for a week at the outside," he replied. "We ought by that time to have ferreted out any Purcells there may be within fifteen miles of Bath; but I think it will be wise for you to pack up a small trunk with a relay of clothing, and tell your landlady that she is to send that on to you at once if you write for it."

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CHAPTER VI.

THE SEARCH BEGINS.

THE next morning at the appointed hour Constance Corbyn and Madame Duport were on the platform at Paddington, and were joined two minutes later by Robert Harbut. "I congratulate you on your punctuality," he said as he joined them. "That is a hopeful sign. You know the motto, 'Punctuality, security and despatch.' No? It is that of the London Parcels Delivery, and upon the whole they act up to it. Now then, let us see about our places first. You have got tickets; that is right. Ah, here is an empty carriage. If you place your rugs on this seat, one each side of that window, I will put my bag next to them. That is it, now we have got possession of the seats. Where is your luggage? Is it all contained in that bag?"

"Our portmanteau is labelled and put in the van," Madame Duport said. "I am accustomed to traveling in England and seeing after luggage."

"Capital, then I have only to jump out and get two or three papers so that I can read when my conversation becomes insupportable."

"He is funny," Constance said as Robert Harbut leaped from the carriage, "he is quite unlike Frenchmen. One minute I think him a clever man and the next an absurd boy."

"They are like that, these English," Madame Duport said. "They are much younger than Frenchmen. The first desire of the French boy is to be thought a man, but these young Englishmen seem to like to remain boys for ever so long, and yet they are full of sense."

It was a pleasant journey down.

After chatting for a bit, Robert Harbut handed two illustrated papers to his companions, and saying, "I suppose you do not care for English Politics," opened the *Times*.

Constance looked at him with much surprise, as he began reading, and then said, "Excuse me, Mr. Harbut, but I thought you used spectacles."

The young barrister laughed.

"You will not see me use them again, Miss Corbyn. It was only because I had forgotten them as well as the wig that you saw me in them. The fact is, my sight is excellent, but you see I am painfully conscious of my youthful appearance, and I wear those great glasses to give me an air of gravity and wisdom. I do think their appearance is very effective."

"It is very striking," Constance laughed. "Really when I first saw you with that strange wig on, and those great round glasses, you reminded me of an owl."

"I have observed the resemblance myself when I have glanced into the glass before going into court. You see the owl has a reputation for wisdom."

"I think you look much wiser without those glasses, Mr. Harbut. The owl may have a reputation for wisdom, but I think it is also said 'as stupid as an owl.' You see your eyes didn't seem to have any expression behind those glasses; they look, well they look as if they could see sharply enough now that one sees them naturally."

"I will think over what you have said, Miss Corbyn," he said gravely. "It would be a serious matter to leave them off now, just when they are beginning to have an effect, for I have had two briefs this last six months."

"Do you think we had better go to an hotel, monsieur?" Annette asked as the train approached Bath.

"I should think you would feel strange and uncomfortable in an hotel," he replied. "There will be no difficulty in getting a quiet little lodging; half the houses in Bath are let in lodgings. When we get there we can leave our things in the cloak-room and hunt about, and then when you find something to suit you we can come back to the station for your things. Of course, I shall put up at an hotel. I think, Madame Duport, it would be better for you to give your name to the landlady. There will be no occasion to mention Miss Corbyn's name, as it will be naturally assumed she is your daughter. You see the name of Corbyn is very well known in Bath, and as the names of visitors are published in the local papers it would be just as well that it should not appear."

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"But Mr. Clitheroe knows that we are going to search," Constance said. "Of course, Mr. Ferris will have told him. Mr. Ferris said that Mr. Clitheroe was only anxious that the truth should be discovered."

"Yes, no doubt, Miss Corbyn. Still you see they are in fact our opponents, and in matters of this sort it is always as well to keep one's opponents in the dark as far as one can as to what you are doing. It is never any use giving away a chance."

"At any rate," Madame Duport said; "we will do as you suggest, Mr. Harbut, there is not the least occasion for giving her name, of course she will be taken for my daughter."

An hour after their arrival in Bath, Madame Duport and Constance were installed in lodgings near the station, and Robert Harbut had taken a room at the York Hotel. His first step was to go down to the Coffee Room and to look through the town Directory. There was no such name as Purcell; then he examined a county Directory, but again without success. He was scarcely disappointed, unless the Purcells were in trade, or were people of some note or importance, they would hardly be down in a county Directory. Then he went down to the Police Station and inquired for the inspector.

"This is my card, inspector," he said; "I belong as you see to the Middle Temple, and am desirous of finding out some people whom I have reason to believe resided at one time somewhere in the neighborhood of Bath; perhaps in the town itself, perhaps ten or twelve miles off."

"What is the name, sir?"

"Purcell."

"I do not know the name," the inspector said; "do you know what condition of life they were in?"

"I should say that they did not belong to the upper class, certainly not to any county family; but on the other hand I do not think that they were of the laboring class. They may have been small farmers or shopkeepers."

"I will inquire among the men," the inspector said; "they almost all belong to the county: it is likely enough one or other of them might know the name. How long is it since they were living here?"

"About eighteen years ago."

The inspector wrote upon a piece of paper, "Information required respecting a family named Purcell, living in the neighborhood of Bath eighteen years ago." This he stuck upon the notice board.

"The men always glance at this as they come in," he said. "If you come to-morrow at ten o'clock I shall be able to tell you if any of the force here know anything about it, if not I can send notices to all the county stations."

Robert Harbut returned the next day at noon; he had been to take Madame Duport and Constance for a walk, and had left them at the pump-room while he went to the police station.

"I have found some Purcells," the inspector said as he entered. "At least I have found where a family of that name lived some years ago. One of my men, who comes from a little village named Alnwick, about ten miles to the north-west, tells me that when he was a boy the village schoolmaster was named Purcell. He went to the school himself. He tells me that it was generally supposed the Purcells had seen better days. They are both dead now; they left no children. The man tells me that he remembers there was a great sensation in the village just as he left school, which is eighteen years ago now. There was a daughter who was suddenly missing. Everyone turned out to search for her, thinking some accident must have happened to her, but she was not found. He does not remember more about it, but the search was given up, and he believes, though he is not sure, that it was said that Purcell had received a letter from her, saying that she had gone away to be married. Purcell and his wife both died some years ago, within a few days of each other. Do you think it is likely that those are the people for whom you are in search?"

"I have no doubt whatever about it," Robert Harbut said, "and I am extremely obliged to you for the trouble you have taken in the matter. I believe that the young lady for whom I am acting is the daughter of the girl you speak of. It is very unfortunate that the grandfather and grandmother are both dead, as they might have supplied some information I am desirous of obtaining. However, it is satisfactory to have the point as to where they resided cleared up."

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Robert Harbut went to the pump-room. Constance was watching the door, and in obedience to his sign she and Annette hurried out.

"You have news," she said. "I saw it in your face."

"It's very annoying that you should say so, Miss Corbyn. A barrister's face ought to be impassive. Yes, I have news; partly good and partly bad. I have found where your grandfather and grandmother lived. He was a schoolmaster, but I am sorry to say that both he and his wife are dead."

Constance uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"It seems to me that is all bad news, Mr. Harbut. It makes no difference as to what village they lived in; what we wanted was information; and now there is no chance of getting it. That seemed to be the only clue we had, and now it is lost."

"I should not quite say that, Miss Corbyn; not yet. It is possible that they may have confided in someone in the village all they knew about the disappearance of your mother. The man who gave the inspector information about it, and who was at school under your grandfather, said it was generally believed that he had been in much better circumstances at one time. It is probable that your mother wrote to him at times during her year of married life. I do not know whether your father ever acquainted them with her death, as likely as not he may not have done so; in that case when her letters ceased, they may have guessed that she was dead, but may have still hoped on that she might some day return. In that case, they may possibly have left a letter or some communication with someone, probably with the clergyman, to be given to her should she ever return. At any rate, it is worth seeing whether this is the case. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, certainly," Constance exclaimed. "How fortunate you came down with us, Mr. Harbut, I should never have thought of that, and if I had found, as you have done, that they were dead, I should have given up the search in this direction altogether. When shall we go? Is there time to-day?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. We will go into a pastry cook's and get some lunch, and then will be off."

Half-an-hour later they had arranged with the driver of a carriage to take them to Alnwick. It was a long journey

for the roads were hilly, and the Bath drivers do not hurry their horses. Robert Harbut chatted with Madame Dupont, for Constance was too excited and anxious to join in the conversation.

"This is Alnwick," the driver said, turning round on his box as they entered a village. "Where shall I take you, sir?"

"To the Rectory."

As they drove up to the door, Robert Harbut said, "I think I had better do the talking, Miss Corbyn."

Constance nodded. She was too anxious to speak. The barrister handed his card to the servant, and said he wished for a few minutes' conversation with the rector. They were shown into the drawing-room, and a minute later the rector entered, and Robert Harbut saw with satisfaction that he was a man of some sixty-five years old.

"We have called, sir," he began, "to ask you if you can give us any information about a Mr. and Mrs. Purcell. He was, I believe, schoolmaster here."

"He was," the rector replied. "He and his wife both died some eight years ago." As he spoke he glanced earnestly at the two ladies.

"We have reason to believe," Mr. Harbut went on, "that this young lady is their grand-daughter."

"Is her mother dead?" the clergyman asked quickly.

"She died some seventeen years ago, after giving birth to her child."

"I was afraid so. Her last letter to her mother said that she was expecting to be confined shortly, and that she hoped that ere very long she should return with her husband and child. They never heard from her again, and their belief, as well as my own, was that she must have died about that time. I was very much interested," he went on, turning to Constance, "in your mother's fate. She was my principal assistant in the Sunday school, and was a girl of excellent principles and disposition. I was so convinced of this that I was able to agree cordially with her parents in their belief in the statements in her letters, that she was married. Of course she was sadly, terribly to blame in leaving home in the way she did, and in suffering herself to be persuaded by some——" and then remembering that the man of whom he was about to speak harshly was the father of the girl to whom he was speaking, he stopped.

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"Do you know who my father was, sir?" Constance asked in a low voice.

"Do you not know?" the clergyman answered in surprise. "No. Your grandmother and grandfather had no idea whatever. They were inclined to believe at first that it must be somebody that she met in London when she was staying there with an aunt some time before. But it came out afterwards that some of the village boys had once or twice seen her in the evenings, walking with a gentleman in a quiet lane, half a mile away. Still of course, she may have made his acquaintance in town. He may have followed her here, but more than that we never ascertained.

"I may tell you your grandfather and grandmother always lived in hopes that your father would some day bring you back to them. It was possible, of course, that the child might have died as well its mother, but they felt sure that if it lived sooner or later they would hear of it. They never did hear, but upon his death-bed your grandfather, who survived his wife but a few days, gave me a packet which he begged me to deliver to his daughter's child, should she ever return. I suppose, sir," he said, turning to Mr. Harbut, "you can assure me that this young lady is really the child of Constance Purcell.

"I can assure you of that, sir," Madame Duport said. "She died in my house. I took the child from her arms, and have brought her up ever since."

"Then I will give you the packet," the clergyman said, and, leaving the room, he returned in a minute or two with a bulky envelope, which he placed in Constance's hands. "I am pleased indeed," he said, "that I am able to carry out the last wishes of my friend Purcell. Your grandfather was a man of good education. He was the son, he told me, of a City merchant, and was educated at Oxford. His father died just as he left the University. He took to the business for which he was altogether unfitted, and two or three years later failed. He had married the daughter of a clergyman, and after years of struggle he at last accepted the mastership of this village school. The stipend was a very small one, but there was a comfortable cottage, and a good garden attached to it, and he told me that he had been perfectly contented and happy until the flight of his daughter broke up their home."



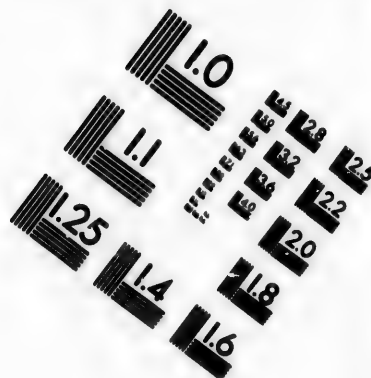
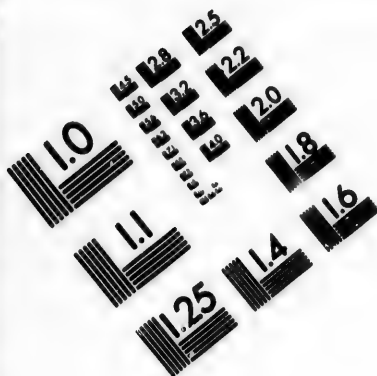
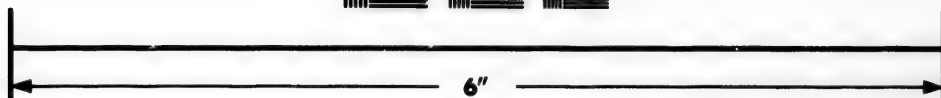
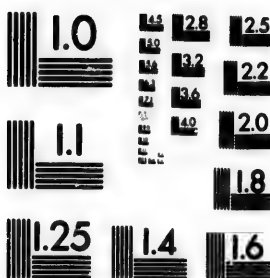


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Constance was pale and trembling.

"I thank you very much for what you have told me," she said, "and for keeping these papers for me."

Then she glanced at Robert Harbut, who understood what she would say.

"Thank you very much, sir. Now we will take our leave; the young lady will, of course, be anxious to read these papers in private. Should she find the clue to the place of her parents' marriage, you will certainly hear of her again."

For some little time after taking their seats in the carriage again, few words were spoken. Constance Corbyn was greatly moved, and as she sat with her head bent down Robert Harbut saw several tears fall on the packet which she clasped in her hands.

"I think, Miss Corbyn," he said at last, "that I may congratulate you on the result of your visit. We may not perhaps have gained any material clue which would be of assistance to us, but it cannot but be gratifying for you to know the high estimation in which your mother was regarded by the clergyman of the village, and it is pleasing no doubt to be aware that her father and mother were persons of good family and education. It is a weakness perhaps, but it is human nature."

"I am glad," she said. "I had hardly hoped to get so much news of my mother. I am very glad that I came."

"So am I, Miss Corbyn; it is most satisfactory to me. You see, before I had really nothing but Madame Dupont's conviction, that your mother was speaking the truth when she said that a marriage had taken place, to go upon. Now at least, though legal proof may still be wanting, I have heard what may be considered as perfect unprejudiced testimony as to the character she bore as a girl, and that the clergyman of the place as well as her father and mother believed that she was married. I fear that we shall not obtain any further clue from those papers, whatever they may be, as it is clear that neither the old people nor the rector had the least idea as to whom it was she had eloped with. Of course, if we can glean nothing there we shall have to start on some entirely fresh line."

Half an hour later the driver checked his horse. "There, sir," he said pointing with his whip, "that is one of the oldest county places about Bath. Same family has lived

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there hundreds and hundreds of years they say. Corbyn Court, that is what it is called. The late Mr. Corbyn was killed, he was, a short time back; thrown out of a dog-cart going down into Bath. Killed stone dead they say. A nephew of his has got it now; nice young chap he is. He is not a Corbyn though, but I expect like enough he will take his uncle's name."

The three occupants of the carriage had been gazing intently at the house as he spoke. Madame Duport had stood up the better to examine it.

"It is a grand place," she said as she sat down, "and to think that it ought to be yours, *ma petite*."

Constance shivered. "It is too large and too lonely," she said, "I don't want it; I only want to clear her name; when that is done I shall be quite content with enough for us to live quietly and happily at St. Malo."

Robert Harbut had turned round and was leaning forward against the driver's seat. "What sort of a man was the late Mr. Corbyn? I have heard his name before."

"He was very much respected, sir; I heard that he was a good landlord, and was thought a deal of down in Bath."

"And his nephew succeeds him, you say. What's his name?"

"Clitheroe. It is a lucky windfall for him. His own place is over the other way, and they say was mortgaged pretty heavily in his father's time. If it had not been for that slippery bit of hill he might have had to wait a long time before he came in for the Court, for Mr. Corbyn was not more than forty-two and might have lived to eighty."

Mr. Harbut continued to chat with the coachman on the subject of the Corbyns for some time, but gained no information of any importance. On arriving at the lodgings he said to Constance, "I will come in at eight o'clock to hear whether you have gathered any news from those papers."

When Robert Harbut called in the evening at the lodgings he was received by Madame Duport only.

"She has gone to lie down," she said. "Poor child, she has gone through the packet containing the letters of her mother to her parents; there are ten of them. She wrote once a month. Here they are. Constance wished you to read them, but we fear that they will not help us. She tells about her travels and about her home, and how

she longs to see them again, but nothing that we can see that will help us at all. She never mentions the name of the place she writes from, and only puts Italy, or Switzerland, or Germany."

"Perhaps I had better read them," Robert Harbut said; "some chance word may give us a clue."

The letters were all in the envelopes in which they had been received, and were numbered one to ten; the first he read carefully and laid aside, the others he merely glanced through. The writer always spoke of herself as well and happy, always said that her husband was very kind, and that she was enjoying the sight of the foreign countries she had read about. The greater part of each letter was devoted to her old home, to her longings to see her father and mother again, to her regret at the pain she must have caused them, and to her hope that she should some day be able to atone for it and to have them near her in comfort.

They were natural, loving letters, and as he put them down Robert Harbut said to himself, "There is no doubt whatever that the poor little girl thought herself married, though, of course, the blackguard may have deceived her by a false marriage."

All these nine letters bore the London postmark; it was evident that in order to prevent any clue as to their place of residence being obtained Algernon Corbyn had sent them under cover to London, to be posted there. The first letter was written in pencil, evidently in great haste, and, the barrister thought, without the knowledge of her husband. It was as follows:—

"DEAREST FATHER AND MOTHER,—I have been awfully wicked in running away from you without telling you where I was going, but I hope some day you will forgive me, when you know all. You will see that it was necessary to be secret. I love him so. We were married this morning. I hope soon to be able to tell you all. I should be the happiest woman in the world if my heart did not seem breaking at the thought of the trouble I have caused you. Pray forgive me, and think as kindly as you can of your loving daughter, CONSTANCE."

The letter itself gave no clue, but the envelope did, for it bore the postmark Folkestone.

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"Well, monsieur?" Madame Duport asked as Robert Harbut laid the letters aside and turned his chair from the table at which he had been reading them.

"It is well, Madame Duport. This first letter gives us the clue we want; it is posted at Folkestone, there is the postmark on the envelope. There is no doubt Mrs. Corbyn scribbled that letter and posted it without her husband's knowledge. She knew the pain her parents were suffering, and could not delay writing to assure them that she was married. Of course, it is just possible that the marriage took place in London, but that they went down to Folkestone immediately after the ceremony, and that she dropped the letter in a post office that evening, and went on board the steamer at Dover next day, for I do not think the boats ran from Folkestone then. However, it is evident that Folkestone is the next place to try at; if we do not find the marriage registered there, it is almost certain to have been either in London or at Canterbury, so that in any case a great step has been made. I say honestly that when I started from London yesterday morning, I had only the very faintest hope we should ever succeed. Now I really think we shall do so. I consider that our success so far has been quite remarkable. There is nothing more for us to do here now; I think that we may as well go up to town in the morning."

Two days later Robert Harbut with his two clients arrived at Folkestone, and at once proceeded to the Parish Church. They had no difficulty in finding the residence of the clerk; he was a man of about thirty-five years old.

Mr. Harbut said, "I want to search the register for a record of marriage."

"Very well, sir," the man said, taking down a key, "the registers are in a safe in the vestry. What year was it in?"

"Somewhere about the end of 1849, I believe. Was your present vicar here at that time?"

"Oh, no, sir; he has only been here seven or eight years, the old vicar died in 1859. He and my father, who was clerk before me, died within three days of each other. There, sir, these are the registers, let me see, 1849. Yes, they end with this volume, the next begins 1850."

The marriage should have taken place on November 21st, for that was the date of the postmark of the Folke-

stone letter, and Robert Harbut ran his eye rapidly down the entries.

"It is not there," he said, in a tone of great disappointment, "there is no entry between the 12th and 26th. There are five marriages between the 1st and 12th, and two at the end of the month, that is curious too. He took up the book by both sides and bent them back. "There has been foul play here," he said, "it looks as if a page has been cut out. There is the edge of it."

"So it is," the clerk said, examining the book, "sure enough a leaf has been cut out there, that is very extraordinary, I never noticed it before."

"You would not have noticed it unless your attention had been called to it by an entry on that page being asked for. This is most unfortunate. Is there anyone alive who would have been likely to be present at weddings about that time?"

"I don't think so," the clerk said, "beyond the vicar and my father and the pew opener, and of course the friends of the married couple, no one would be likely to be there, unless the parties were known about here. The pew opener who was here then died fifteen or sixteen years ago."

"Well, I think at any rate," Robert Harbut said, "you had better come across with me at once with this book to the rector, that he may see that this leaf has been cut out. It is a very serious business, most serious. Will you stay in the churchyard, Miss Corbyn, until I return? There will be no occasion for you to come in with me."

Not a word was spoken between Constance and Annette Duport until Robert Harbut returned. Constance looked at him inquiringly; he shrugged his shoulders.

"The vicar is greatly distressed and annoyed. It is of course entirely new to him. He says that no doubt it took place long before his time, but of course that may or may not be. You see there were in that book two weddings on the page, and I cannot say with any certainty whether it was abstracted by somebody desirous of destroying the record of this or of the other marriage. At any rate I am afraid for the present we are completely stumped. I mean," he went on, in answer to Constance's look of interrogation, "that we are for the present brought to a full stop by an impassable obstacle."

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"But is there no other way, Mr. Harbut? We have been so wonderfully successful up to now. Surely we cannot be altogether defeated by the loss of this register; there must be some other way of proving the marriage."

"No doubt, no doubt," Robert Harbut agreed, speaking in a hopeful tone, "it is only that we are brought up so suddenly on this particular line. We followed the scent hotly, and have met with, what they call in hunting, a check, and then the only thing is to make a cast in a fresh direction until we get on the scent again. At present the result is so unexpected, and I confess that the disappointment is so keen that one cannot pull oneself together all at once. But when we have time to think the matter over again some fresh light may occur to us."

"I think you only say so, Mr. Harbut," Constance said, quietly, "to relieve my disappointment; but I always like to know the truth, and would rather that you told me frankly if you thought that all was lost."

"Indeed, I do not think so, Miss Corbyn. I do not disguise from you that the abstraction of this leaf from the register enormously adds to our difficulties, and that at present I do not in the slightest degree see in what direction we must search for collateral evidence of the marriage. Still you see things have up till now presented themselves in a most unexpected way, and we have succeeded in a marvelous manner in ascertaining a number of particulars. We have learnt your mother's birthplace and parentage, have received the clergyman's testimony as to her character, and your grandfather's last letter to her and her letters to him. We cannot absolutely say that we have discovered for certain that they were married in this town, for whatever our ideas on the subject may be, there is no shadow of proof that the missing page contained the register of that marriage. We have assumed that it took place here, but your mother's letter did not say that it did so; all that we know is that the letter was posted here, but they may have been married in London before leaving town, or at Canterbury or some other place on the road. We may have to grope in the dark for a bit, but I trust that we may come across a clue again. You see, Miss Corbyn, I have engaged in this matter as a sort of amateur private detective, and consider that my honor is at stake in ferretting out the matter if it be possible to do so."

"You are very kind and good," Constance said gratefully. "I suppose we may as well go back to town at once; it will be of no use searching the registers at other churches, I suppose."

"I should hardly think so," he said, "it was sure to have been the Parish Church if anywhere, at least I should think so; however, it is of no use throwing away a chance, and now we are here it is better to decide the question. I will invest at once in a sixpenny guidebook," and he ran into a stationer's shop.

"Now, here are the churches and the dates of their building. You see there was only one other at that time. It is not worth while for you to trouble about it. I will go and have a look at the registers."

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CHAPTER VII.

ROBERT HARBUT returned in a quarter of an hour to the two ladies.

"There is no such record," he said, "the Parish Church is evidently the established place for marriages here; there were only half a dozen celebrated during the whole year elsewhere, and not one in the month in which we are searching. Now we have just time to catch the four o'clock train."

It was already getting dusk. Constance leaned back in one corner of the carriage and closed her eyes. Robert Harbut occupied the corner opposite to her; he did not try to break the current of the girl's thoughts, but sat staring out of the window and trying to see some way out of the difficulty that had encountered them. Annette Duport sat bolt upright, produced a ball of worsted from her hand-bag and began to knit vigorously. It was not until they were approaching London that Constance broke the silence.

"Did the cut seem to you a new one or an old one, Mr. Harbut?"

"We could not decide, there was really nothing to go by; it was evidently cut with a sharp knife and hastily, for the point in some places had penetrated the next three or four leaves. The rector lent me a magnifying glass, but even this told us nothing. The book was, as you saw, in an excellent state of preservation and altogether untouched by air or damp. The color of the paper is almost as fresh as when it was first printed. My own opinion was that the cut was not a new one, the rector and clerk both thought that it hadn't been done long; but I do not think that any of our opinions were worth anything. If in the course of our searches we find that the question of the date of this cut becomes important, we can get some experts down to give us their opinion about it; but, as a barrister, I own that I have the smallest possible belief in experts. You

can get half-a-dozen of them to swear to almost anything you want, whether it is a question of handwriting or the action of a poison, or a proof of insanity, and the other party will produce the same number who will swear diametrically opposite."

After seeing the ladies home to their lodging, and promising that he would let them hear from him in the course of a day or two, when he had time to turn the matter quietly over in his mind, Robert Harbut strolled slowly back to his chambers, with his eyes bent on the ground, and his hands buried deep in his coat pockets. His mind was quite made up as to the abstraction of the leaf.

"So," he said to himself, "that rascal never intended to do justice to his daughter after all. Her mother would not go with him without a legal marriage, and perhaps had she lived he might some day have acknowledged it, but after a time he determined to destroy all traces of it, and either he himself, or someone else for him, cut out that leaf. Most likely he did it himself; he would not be such a fool to give anyone else the whip hand over him. He knew that the clergyman and the clerk and the pew-opener were all old people, and might well reckon upon their death long before any inquiry would be likely to be made for this register. You may have been a respectable man in the eye of the world, Mr. Corbyn, but to my mind you were a rascal," only Robert Harbut used a very strong word before the word rascal.

He went up to his rooms, applied a match to the fire already laid in the grate with a kettle full of water upon it, brought out a small tray of tea things from a cupboard, and then, sitting down in his great coat until the room became warmed, gazed into the fire.

"There is one point we have missed," he said, suddenly rising to his feet. "We presumed that there were no other witnesses to the marriage beyond the clerk and pew-opener. There may have been other people who sauntered in, seeing the church door open. The question is, how the deuce to get at them."

Presently he went to his writing table and scribbled out the following:—"Twenty Pounds Reward will be given for the discovery of anyone who was present at a marriage which took place at Folkestone Parish Church on the 21st of November, 1851. Both parties were young, the gentle-

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man fair and somewhat over middle height : the lady was about eighteen years of age, had brown hair, and was very pretty. There were no bridesmaids or friends of either of the parties present. Any information as to anyone now living who was present at the ceremony is to be sent to Mr. Harbut, Pump Court, Middle Temple, by whom the above reward will be paid."

This notice was enclosed with a note to the Clerk of Folkestone Church, requesting him to have a couple of hundred copies printed and exposed in the shops and other places in the town. The account for expenses was to be sent to him. He then wrote a note to Constance, telling her what he had done, and went out and posted it at once.

"I am afraid she will be terribly down in the morning. When she gets this note at breakfast time it will give her something to think about."

Rather to his surprise, at two o'clock on the following day, the clerk brought in the names of Madame Duport and Miss Corbyn.

"I am ashamed to bother you again, Mr. Harbut."

"No bother at all, Miss Corbyn, my thoughts keep on running on this business, and it is a relief to me to talk about it. Have you come to suggest any improvement upon my idea?"

"No, sir, I think it is excellent, but Annette thought of something while we were at dinner to-day that she did not mention before, and although I do not consider it of any importance, I thought I had better come and tell you."

"Everything is of importance, Miss Corbyn, there is no saying where light may flash from."

"It was this," Annette began. "I remember when I was talking one day with Mrs. Corbyn, I said to the poor dear that it must have been very difficult for her and her husband traveling so long abroad when she spoke no French, and her husband very little. She said that they got on very well because her husband had a servant who spoke French very fairly. He had been with them all the time they had been traveling, and had only left them just before they came to St. Malo as they no longer required him."

"This is most important," Robert Harbut said in great excitement. "I told you we should get hold of some fresh clue. People never remember everything at first. No

doubt this man was engaged before they started on their trip, and would probably enough have been in church, and I daresay signed his name as witness to the marriage. If we can get hold of him, and he is a respectable man, whose antecedents will bear cross-examination, his evidence, taken with all we know, would prove the marriage. He is not likely to have been a servant from their place at home. Corbyn would never put himself in the power of anyone who knew his people there.

"It was probably some courier he hired here. You see your mother said he spoke French very fairly, that would mean that he was not a Frenchman. He may have been some servant who had accompanied some friend of his on a similar trip, for a courier would have spoken French well. The only way that I see of getting at it, at present, is by advertising. Of course it may not be an easy matter to find him, still I regard it as very hopeful. Before this, we weren't sure that anyone was in a position to give us legal evidence of this marriage, now we have every reason to believe that there is at least one person alive who can do so."

"If he is alive, Mr. Harbut. It is eighteen years ago."

"Of course, if he is alive, Miss Corbyn; but eighteen years are nothing, and this sort of wandering Jew men live to any age. Besides, even if he is dead, we might find out his wife or some one belonging to him, and it will be something to hear from them that he had told them he had accompanied Mr. Corbyn and his wife on their wedding trip, and had been present when they were married at Folkestone, or at London, or wherever it was. Well, this is great news. I did not feel hopeless before, very far from it, Miss Corbyn, but this gives an agreeable fillip, and shows one that there are all sorts of possibilities that one has not contemplated. I wonder why it did not strike me at once that your father would probably have taken somebody with him on to the Continent. I have been getting a little puffed up lately as to my own sagacity. This comes as a *douche* of cold water upon me, and will make me more humble-minded in future. Now what are you going to do? The British public, as usual, have no occasion for my services, and my time is my own."

"We were not thinking of anything particular, Mr. Harbut. We are both fond of looking into shops. We thought

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of going down the Strand and up Regent Street, along Oxford Street and down Bond Street again. That is our usual promenade when we have nothing else to do. You know St. Malo is not famous for its shops, and, besides, all the crowd and bustle is new to me and very amusing."

"I will go with you if I may; I am very fond of taking children to a pantomime. By-the-way, have you been to a pantomime, Miss Corbyn?"

"No, I have not been," Constance laughed. "Do you think it will amuse me?"

"I am sure of it. I am always amused myself, amazingly. It will be a real treat to take you. May we consider that settled, madame?"

Madame Duport looked doubtful, and Robert Harbut burst into a merry laugh.

"The *convenances*, madame; I see them in your eye. You do not reflect that I am the same as an old married man."

Constance joined in the laugh.

"But where is the wife, Mr. Harbut. After all, I suppose that even married men do not take young ladies about unbeknown, as it were, to their wives."

"You are quite right, Miss Corbyn, and I proposed to myself when I made the offer that the wife should make one of the party. I have already spoken to her many times about you, and she would have called with me to have made your acquaintance before this had you not always been on the wing since you have been here. Madame Duport, the *convenances* shall be observed. The young woman in question is a good deal more engaged than I am, and I must consult her as to her evenings off, and as soon as I learn that I will make our arrangements, for I know that your evenings are disengaged, and that it will be the same to you whatever day we fix upon."

"Thank you, Mr. Harbut," Constance said warmly. "I should indeed like to know the young lady to whom you are engaged."

"You are thinking that she must be a queer girl, Miss Corbyn. Do not shake your head, for I know that must be in your mind. Yes, I am aware all her friends think she is a little mad. It is for her sake chiefly that I want to get my first brief in a deep, dry case, a case demanding great research and legal knowledge. Then you know I

shall silence them. She will, of course, keep the report of the case in her writing desk, and when any allusions are made to my youth, she will hand it over to them and say severely, 'Read that.' And now let us start."

They walked down the Strand together, stopping and looking into many shops, Harbut keeping his companions in a frequent laugh by his quaint criticisms and remarks, and by his entreaties to them to purchase the most unlikely articles. They crossed the top of Trafalgar Square and then went up Regent Street. They were about half way up when Robert Harbut uttered an exclamation as an open carriage with a pair of horses drove away from the front of a shop just before they reached it. "Hi, hulloa!" he shouted, but the coachman not dreaming that such exclamations could be addressed to himself, drove on without looking round. To the surprise of the ladies, Robert Harbut dashed off at the top of his speed, overtook the carriage before it had gone fifty yards, and thrust the point of his umbrella into the coachman's back. The man looked round with an expression of indignant astonishment, and then seeing who it was, pulled in the horses with a surly smile.

"My dear Robert, have you gone out of your senses? I never did see such a boy, and in the middle of Regent Street too!"

The speaker was the sole occupant of the carriage, a pretty girl of some nineteen years old, with a bright piquant face.

"If you could suggest, Hilda," Robert said in an injured voice, "any other method by which I could stop you I will adopt it next time. Your coachman and footman both appeared to be deaf, and as there was no telegraph wire available, I don't see how I could stop you without the use of my legs."

"But you are going to dine with us this evening, Robert."

"I have not forgotten the engagement, Hilda, but I suppose it occurs to you as possible that I wish to speak to you before dinner."

"Well, don't stand there in the middle of the road but get in."

"It does not suit me to get in, but I will put somebody else in if you don't mind. Look here, child, you know I told you about my French client."

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"The young lady you are always going about with, Robert?"

"Yes."

"And you know I am very jealous of her; she takes up more of your time than I do."

"Well, you know," he went on, ignoring the attack, "I wanted you to call on and be kind to her. There she is now, and it is a fine opportunity. So tell your man to drive to the side of the pavement, and get out and let me introduce you to her and her dragon. She wants a friend awfully. Don't pout, Hilda, but just do as you are told, and then take them for a drive in the park or somewhere, and get acquainted with them."

The young lady raised her eyebrows.

"I suppose I must do as I am told, Robert, but mind I don't promise to like her. My predispositions at present are quite the other way." So saying she gave the necessary orders to the coachman, and a minute later Robert handed her out of the carriage, and then walked back with her to the spot where he had left his companions.

"That is Miss Corbyn, Hilda, the girl in the brown dress."

"Oh, Robert, you never told me she was pretty. My predispositions are heightened."

"You are a little goose, Hilda; now behave nicely. I must apologize for leaving you without ceremony, Miss Corbyn, but you know a lost opportunity never recurs. I just caught sight of the back of this young lady's bonnet, and knew by the untidy way the hair was blowing about who it was. This is Miss Leicester, the young lady of whom you have heard me speak. I thought I would bring you together at once, it is so much nicer than a formal call. Hilda, this is Miss Corbyn and Madame Duport."

The girls shook hands.

"I am so glad to meet you, Miss Leicester," Constance Corbyn said frankly. "Mr. Harbut has been so extremely kind to us, that I naturally wished to see you."

"I have had my curiosity too, Miss Corbyn," Hilda said, as she shook hands with Madame Duport. "Of course, I have been very interested in Robert's first client."

"Now it is no use standing talking here," Robert Harbut broke in. "We are in the way of everybody."

"Will you go for a drive with me, Miss Corbyn, you and Madame Duport? Of course, London is quite strange

to you. We can go round the parks, and I should be so glad of a talk with you."

"I should like it very much," Constance said, and in another minute they were seated in the carriage, Constance by the side of Miss Leicester, as Madame Duport insisted on taking the opposite seat.

"I suppose you are not coming, Robert?" Miss Leicester said; "we don't want you; in fact, you would be a good deal in the way."

"I am not thinking of coming," he said, with dignity. "I know that if I do come, you will be able to think of no one else, and I want you to make yourself agreeable. Drive on, John, the Marble Arch and then through the Park."

Neither of the girls were shy, and they were soon in full talk. Constance enjoyed her drive immensely. She was thoroughly taken out of herself and her troubles, for the object for which she came to England was not alluded to, the talk bearing almost entirely upon her life at St. Malo, and in comparisons between her school and that at which Miss Leicester had been educated. The latter would have driven them home when the drive was over, but this they would not hear of, and so they were set down close to Piccadilly Circus, where they would be able to obtain an omnibus, which would take them close to their door.

"Don't forget your engagement for to-morrow, Madame Duport; one o'clock. No. 250 Chester Square; there will be nobody at home but myself, and after lunch we will drive down to Richmond and come back to tea at five o'clock."

At dinner that evening Miss Leicester took Robert Harbut severely to task.

"I consider that you have deceived me grossly, sir. You said that she was nice looking. Nice looking is not at all the word for her; I call her beautiful. You said that she was a nice sort of girl, which means nothing. She is charming. If you were anyone but yourself, I should be very jealous. As it is, I pity your short-sightedness."

"That is caused, Hilda, no doubt, by looking so much at you."

"If you talk nonsense, Robert, we will not continue the conversation."

"Well I mean, dear, that I regard you as so nearly approaching perfection that I don't ask myself whether any other girls are particularly pretty or particularly nice, I simply have nothing to do with them."

"Nothing to do with them, sir! when you have been jaunting off to Bath and going about with her there, and then going down to Folkestone and acting altogether in a manner that would have driven any woman but myself to the verge of distraction; and you call that having nothing to do with them."

"It was a matter of business, Hilda. I took it up solely with the idea of distinguishing myself; and as I told you I put the matter on a proper footing at once by telling her that I was engaged."

"And a more impudent thing to do I never heard of, Robert. You must have a good opinion of yourself to consider it necessary to warn such a girl as that, that she must not fall in love with you."

"No, no; it was the other way, Hilda; I merely wished to assure her that I had not thought of falling in love with her—which is quite a different thing."

"But seriously, Robert, are you going to prove her to be an heiress?"

"I am afraid not," Robert Harbut said, looking grave. "It seemed all clear sailing at first, and as I told you I thought I was going to carry her through with flying colors, but we had an ugly check yesterday. I will tell you about it when I get you alone. I am glad you liked her; I should not be surprised if you will be able to do her some kindness before the matter is finished."

"I will do anything I can, Robert; she is charming—a thoroughly nice, natural girl, without the least nonsense about her. She has a great sense of humor, and her description of her school-life was most amusing."

The next day's drive cemented the friendship between Hilda Leicester and Constance Corbyn, who liked each other all the better from the radical differences in their character. The straightforward and outspokenness of Constance, her decided views on many points, and her absolute ignorance on others, surprised and amused the London girl, while the latter's little touches of sarcasm, her habit of laughing at things in general, and at herself and Robert in particular, were altogether new to Constance.

Hilda Leicester had been a spoiled child. Her father was a wealthy banker, her two brothers, who were both in the business, were years older than she was, and, being the only daughter, she had been the pet and plaything in the family, indulged in every whim and caprice.

Fortunately for her, her mother, a quiet-loving woman, had found her at a very early age too much for her, and had succeeded in having her sent to school instead of being educated at home by a governess as her father had intended should be the case. Once finished, she had, on returning home, resumed her position as pet and tyrant of the house, but even her father's desire to make her happy had failed to win his consent to her wishes, when she had first announced her intention of marrying Robert Harbut. The thing was, as both he and her brothers considered, a piece of midsummer madness. In the first place they had expected that she would make a grand match. They thought so much of her themselves that they naturally expected others would see her as they did.

It was not so much a question of money, although how Hilda, who had been accustomed to every luxury, supposed she was going to exist on the eight hundred a year that Robert had inherited from his parents was more than they could imagine. This point was pressed upon her but she replied calmly:

"I suppose, papa, you do not intend to cut me off with a penny. If you do, you have treated me scandalously, for in that case I ought to have been taught to make my own dresses, and to know how to cook and other useful accomplishments for a poor man's wife. But even without that, Robert says that we can live extremely comfortably on eight hundred a year. Besides, there is his income at the bar. You needn't laugh, papa, he will earn an income in time."

But the question of money was a secondary one altogether in Mr. Leicester's eyes. Robert Harbut was of good birth, and had a very fair income apart from his profession. It was the man himself. They had known Robert almost since he was a child—for his father had been a close friend of the banker's—and he had not ceased to be a boy in their eyes. They had expected, somehow, that Hilda would choose some man that she could look up to, who would have a strong influence over her, and would, in fact, as her brother remarked, keep her in order.

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"But he is not a boy, papa," Hilda had urged; "it is ridiculous your talking in that way; he is as old as Henry. You know they were in the same form at Eton. He is twenty-seven."

"Well, he may be, my dear, but he looks about eighteen."

"It appears to me, papa, that his looks are my affair rather than yours. I am going to marry Robert Harbut one of these days. He is in no hurry, nor am I. He wants to make his mark at the bar first, and I should like to see him do it, and I know perfectly well he will as soon as he gets a chance. It will be much nicer and pleasanter for you all to recognize this, and to give your cordial approval to it. You have nothing whatever to say against Robert. You have always liked him, and you have always made him at home here."

Mr. Leicester could not deny this.

"But he does look so young," he expostulated, rubbing his short hair violently with his handkerchief.

"I have always thought you a sensible man till now, papa, always. But if you tell me seriously that you object to a man as a son-in-law because nature hasn't given him whiskers, all I can say is that I have been mistaken in my estimate of you. I like him because he is not a humbug, and doesn't, like some people, put on an air of preternatural gravity as he goes up to the City, and try to assume the airs of a business man of fifty," and she emphasized her meaning by waving her hand to her two brothers, who had been endeavoring to assist their father by occasional interjections, which she had hitherto ignored.

They both laughed at this sally.

"I don't think it is necessary to say any more," she said with dignity, "as far as I am concerned, the matter is entirely settled, and the sooner you make up your minds to it, the pleasanter for us all. The stern parent, papa, is ridiculously out of date, and you know perfectly well that you are not qualified for the *rôle*. I hope to-morrow morning you will tell me that you have thought better of it, and that you are quite sure I shall be a very happy woman, and that among all the young men you know there is no one to whom you could more confidently hand me over. Good night, boys; I don't mean to interfere when your time comes, that is, if you don't interfere with me now. Good-night," and Hilda swept out of the drawing-room.

Mr. Leicester looked at his two sons and the three men burst into a fit of laughter.

"It is no use, father," Henry, the elder brother, said, "it is your own fault you know, for you have always let her have her own way, and after all, Robert Harbut is a capital fellow. Of course, Hilda might have done a great deal better, from a worldly point of view, but after all what we want is to see her happy, and I don't think we need have any fear on that score with him."

"I don't care anything about the money," Mr. Leicester said. "Of course, she will have a handsome settlement, and she would do well enough on that score, even supposing he never does make any professional income."

"Robert's no fool, father. We were, as Hilda says, in the same form at Eton when we went there, but he was a long way ahead of me when we left. He did not do anything particular at Cambridge, but that was simply because he never tried. He said he didn't see the point of wasting his time in working for high honors, but there was no fellow at Trinity who had a better library, or who was so well read on general subjects. He used to grind away at law even in those days. I should not be at all surprised if he does make his mark some day, and a high mark too. I believe really the only thing we have to say against him is that he does look very boyish, but after all that is a fault on the right side. Most fellows in our days look older than they are."

The next morning, when Miss Leicester came down to breakfast, she saluted her father with the question, "Well, papa, I suppose that it is all right?"

"I suppose so, Hilda."

"That is good," she said, but although the words were few the kiss that accompanied them told her father that she was grateful to him for giving way to her wishes. As to Mrs. Leicester, she had never made any pretence at resistance, but had said mildly,

"Well, Hilda, of course you will please yourself, but I should have fancied you would have chosen some big man whom you could look up to."

"Not at all, mother. I am perfectly satisfied with my own level, and have not the slightest desire to look up to any one physically. In other respects I certainly know of no one I meet whom I could better look up to. Why, Ro-

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bert Harbut has as much sense in his little finger as most of the young men I know in their heads and bodies."

And so the matter was settled, and although Mr. Leicester and his sons never quite got over their surprise at Hilda's choice, they in time became quite reconciled to it, and agreed that though Robert Harbut was about the last man in the world they should have thought she would have fancied, they were confident that the choice was a wise one in everything save money and position, and that she was likely to be a very happy woman. The engagement was six months' old, and there was no talk of an early marriage, for both were perfectly ready to wait, and Robert was anxious to make a step or two up in his profession before he married.

No answers were received to the advertisements for witnesses to the marriage, or for information respecting the servant who had traveled with Algernon Corbyn. A detective whom Robert had sent down to Bath with instructions to discover some of the servants who lived at Corbyn Court during the time of Algernon's father, and to find out from them whether anyone from that part accompanied Algernon on his travels, returned with the news that so far as they knew he went alone. Robert had seen Constance two or three times in the interval. His own hopes had fallen greatly, but he did his best to keep up an appearance of confidence.

"You do not say so, but I can see that you think my cause is hopeless, Mr. Harbut," she said one evening when he called upon her, and informed her of the failure of his agent to obtain any information about the man who had accompanied her father.

"I do not think it is lost, Miss Corbyn. Many a more hopeless case has been pulled out of the fire before now. I acknowledge that for the present we are baffled, and that think as I will I can see no way whatever of proving our point. The idea may occur to me or to you, or we may come across a clue accidentally. I am as much convinced as you are that the marriage took place, and that being so, the proofs may sooner or later fall into our hands. For instance, this courier, if he was a courier, may be at present traveling on the Continent. He may hear sooner or later of Mr. Corbyn's death, and on finding that his nephew succeeded him in the property would naturally say to him-

self, 'a child was born at St. Malo, and if that child is living, it is the lawful heir of the property.' He would see that there is money to be made out of the thing, and would likely enough go over to St. Malo and make inquiries there."

"That is what I have been thinking, too," the girl said, "but, unfortunately, the man may be dead, or he may be entirely out of the way of hearing of my father's death."

"That may be the case, of course, Miss Corbyn, and I think it would be as well to insert the advertisement for him once a month or so in hopes that it may, if he is alive, sooner or later catch his eye."

"Then you think that it is of no use my waiting here any longer, Mr. Harbut?"

"Frankly, I do not, Miss Corbyn. I do not see that there is anything for you to do. I have already advertised a reward for the register of a marriage, which may have taken place either in a London Church or elsewhere, and I shall do so again at intervals. If I saw that there was a chance of your doing any good by staying here, I should say by all means stay, but I see no good in your wearing yourself out with anxiety without any prospect of benefit."

'I have been talking it over with Madame Duport, Mr. Harbut. Of course, I cannot think of her staying away from her home indefinitely. She has been wonderfully good to me, but I cannot let her do that.'

"I am quite ready to stay," Madame Duport said with tears in her eyes. "I cannot leave her."

"Leave her?" Robert repeated in surprise, "then do you think of staying here alone, Miss Corbyn?"

"I am not thinking of living alone, Mr. Harbut, but I certainly intend to stay in England. I have told you before that I intend to devote my life to prove that my mother was married. I care nothing for the estate, but I will clear my mother's name if it takes me all my life to do it. My idea is to obtain a situation as governess or companion. If I were doing something I could wait patiently, but I could not go back to St. Malo to the quiet life there. I must be doing something to prevent my thinking. As you say, something may occur to me or to you, and I should want to communicate with you."

"Of course—if your mind is quite made up, Miss Corbyn?"

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"My mind is quite made up."

"I will do my best then to help you to obtain such a post as you wish, but I own I do not see that your presence in England would be any advantage, as you could come over from St. Malo at a few hours' notice. Still that is your affair. You will remember—I know the idea is repugnant to you, still it is right I should mention it—that whenever you choose to accept it, your Cousin Philip is ready to settle an annual allowance upon you."

Constance waved the idea aside.

"I would not have accepted it at the first, for to have done so would have been to have admitted that my mother was not married. Now that we are sure that she was, although we may have no legal proof, it would indeed be a base act to do so. What would be the best way to set to work to obtain a situation? Madame Duport says that it would be difficult without recommendations. Of course I speak French as well as English, better I think. I have had good masters in music and drawing, and carried off the prizes in both in my last year at school. I am sure that the mistress would give me testimonials. Had I better advertise, do you think, or put my name down at the offices that Annette says there are for governesses?"

"I will think it over and let you know to-morrow or next day, Miss Corbyn. That matter is quite out of my line, but no doubt I can find out all about it."

That night Robert Harbut wrote a note to Miss Leicester, saying that he would call next day at five o'clock, and that he hoped she would manage to be in, if she could, as he particularly wanted to see her. Hilda had of course been informed of all particulars relating to Constance and her claims, and was quite ready to fall in with any suggestion Robert Harbut might make about her. He began by telling her of the determination that Constance was taking, expressing his own regret that she did not return with her friend to St. Malo.

"I differ from you altogether, Robert, and I think it is perfectly natural that she should not like to settle down to the dull life there. I shouldn't think that anyone almost but not quite able to prove that she is well born and heirless to a grand property, would settle down in a humdrum little French town, with a cloud over her name. Why, it would be enough to make one go out of one's mind. I

think that she is perfectly right to get something to occupy her time with. Now how is she going to set about it? Of course, it makes it difficult her not having been out before. No doubt she could get a place in a school, but that would be slavery; besides, she is altogether too pretty and nice. That would be against her in a private family, too; if there were sons they would be falling in love with her. No, the best thing would be for her to go as companion with some nice person who would treat her as a friend. I have half a mind to tell papa that I want a companion myself, and I am sure I often do."

"How about the brothers, Hilda?"

Miss Leicester tossed her head. She was an ardent champion.

"They might do worse," she said.

"A great deal worse, if she ever succeeds in getting proofs of her mother's marriage; but scarcely otherwise."

"Don't talk in that old-fashioned way, Robert. She is charming, and I know nobody I would rather have as a sister-in-law."

"That may be, Hilda, but I think it would be better to avoid complications of that sort altogether. I admire Miss Corbyn as much as you do, and acknowledge that she would make a charming wife to anyone. Still, indulgent as your father is to you, I doubt if you could persuade him in this matter. Besides it would be absurd your having a companion, especially a girl younger than yourself. What I did think was that, among all your acquaintances, you might be able to find someone who wanted a companion, and being a friend of yours, she would of course occupy a much more pleasant position than if she was taken on in the ordinary way. She would not require a large salary. What she wants is a comfortable home, and I suppose enough money to keep her in clothes. I am sure she would wish to be altogether independent of those good people who brought her up."

"I have no doubt I can find someone, Robert, and if I do not know anyone who actually wants a companion, I have no doubt I can persuade some one into taking her. Look here, I propose that she should come here to stay with me as a friend for a bit. I can easily persuade papa into that, then we could look about, and her face would be a better introduction than any I can give her, and, in the

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meantime, her guardian or her nurse, or whatever you call her, can go quietly home again. I am sure she must be longing to be back at St. Malo."

"I think that that would be a capital plan, Hilda, if your father and mother would consent to it."

CHAPTER VIII.

As Miss Leicester's two brothers happened to be out to dinner on the evening following the conversation between Hilda and Robert Harbut, she had a good opportunity for opening the subject.

"Mamma, I wanted to ask Miss Corbyn to stay here for a bit."

"Who is Miss Corbyn, Hilda?" Mr. Leicester asked.

"Mamma has seen her several times, papa; she is a friend of Robert's, or I suppose I ought to say she is a client of his."

"Oh, has Robert got a client? That is something new. I congratulate you, Hilda."

"Well, she is not exactly a client, papa, not in the ordinary way. She was introduced to him by a legal friend, or rather the case was introduced as being a most interesting one, and he is advising her. I know all about it. She has been shamefully treated, and is heiress to a fine estate if she could only prove it."

"There are a good many people who are heiresses to fine estates if they could only prove it," Mr. Leicester said dryly. "However, my dear, if Robert considers her cause a good one, no doubt there is something in it; at any rate I am sure he would not have introduced her to you had she not been a respectable young person."

Miss Leicester laughed.

"You hear that, mother; a respectable young person. My dear papa, she is one of the most charming girls I have ever met; I am quite in love with her."

"That is all very nice, Hilda; but as you have two brothers resident in the house, I really do not think it desirable to establish so charming a person here, until, at any rate, the heiress-ship is proved."

"My dear papa, we have often had nice girls staying in the house and the boys have not lost their hearts to them. I don't think that after seven or eight years of London society young men are given to falling in love hastily."

"Perhaps not, Hilda; but the unexpected happens sometimes. Are you at liberty to tell us this charming young person's story?"

"No, I think not, papa. Of course, Robert told me."

"Of course, my dear."

"But I am sure he did not mean me to tell anybody; and I am sure she would not like it."

"Well, Hilda, of course I don't know why you particularly wish to ask her here, but I certainly think it had better be avoided if possible. Of course, if Robert approves, there is no reason why you should not be as much with her as you like; but I really do think it would be wiser not to bring her here. I am not at all supposing that your brothers would be likely to fall in love with her, still it is just as well to avoid the possibility of unpleasant complications if one can. Don't you think so, mother?"

"Yes, I quite think so," Mrs. Leicester said. "I have certainly nothing to say against the young lady personally. I have only seen her twice when she has come in with Hilda, and she struck me as a particularly nice girl. Ladylike, and quiet, and with a very bright, pleasant face—a sensible face, and pretty, too; but I do not think it would be quite prudent to bring her into the house."

Miss Leicester was silent.

"I will think it over," she said after a pause, "and see if it can be managed some other way."

Robert had agreed to come round next morning at ten o'clock to hear the result of Hilda's application. He saw at once by her face when he came into the room that she had failed.

"So you haven't been able to get your own way for once?" he said with a smile.

"It is on account of the boys," she said ruefully.

"Well, dear, I really cannot blame your father and mother. One may have every belief that Miss Corbyn is the rightful owner of Corbyn Court; but as I have said, when we talked about it, our chance of proving it appears to me to be small; and if we fail, you must admit, from society's point of view, she would not be a desirable match for either of your brothers. We may also admit that, were she to be in the house three weeks or a month, the chances are strongly in favor of one or other of them falling in love with her. You did not tell them her story, Hilda?"

"Of course not, Robert."

"That is right; the fewer who know it the better. And now, Hilda, have you thought of any other plan?"

Miss Leicester shook her head.

"I have been thinking it over, for it seemed to me likely that your people might object, and it struck me that she might go into one of those homes for governesses—there are such places, I believe—for a bit. You could call for her and take her out and have her at your place sometimes in the day and she would get on very well."

"Yes, I think that would do," Hilda agreed, brightening up. "As you say I could have her a great deal with me during the day."

"At any rate, it would take away her sense of loneliness," Robert said, "and there will be other people there whom she could go out with. To her it would be less dull than where she is now." He looked at his watch. "I have time to go round there before I go in Court; there is nothing like broaching the matter at once. I am sure she is anxious to get something settled."

Robert found Madame Duport and Constance in.

"I have been having a long talk with Miss Leicester about you," he began, "and told her that you want to get a place as governess or companion. She thinks you will find a companion's place much the most pleasant, if you get with a nice woman. She is going to interest herself among her friends, and will, I have no doubt, be able to find you a post before long. She is very energetic when she takes a thing in hand, and will not be long before she persuades some one that the thing she most wants is a lady companion, and that you are the only person in the world who will suit her. But, of course, this cannot be done in an instant. Her idea is this, that as you are anxious Madame Duport should be able to return to St. Malo, you should take up your abode in what they call a Home for Governesses. There are plenty of them scattered about—places where ladies stay who have no friends to go to when out of place, or who want to be in London while looking for one. She proposes that you should find one somewhere near her, and then she can take you out for drives, or you can go and spend the morning and lunch with her whenever you like, which will make a break for you. She will call this afternoon and chat it over with you herself; but I thought I

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might as well come and tell you at once so as to give you time to think it over before she comes."

"But I am in no hurry to go back," Madame Duport said. "I should like to remain with her until she is comfortably placed."

"I am sure of that, madame," Robert Harbut said; "but these matters take time, and we thought that Miss Corbyn, who is, I can see, most unwilling to keep you longer from home, would be fidgetting and worrying over it."

"I think it would be the best plan, Annette," Constance said decidedly. "You know we agreed last night that if I got any fresh clue and have to set about a search again, I should write to you at once and you will come over and chaperone me about; not that I want a chaperone. When we go in an omnibus or anywhere else we see girls of my age going about alone everywhere, and it is ridiculous that I can't do as other people do. Of course, in France it is different, and people would think it extraordinary for a girl to be traveling about by herself. Still I shall be extremely glad to have you with me, if I have to go about again. I think Mr. Harbut's idea an excellent one. You know as well as I do that Victor will be lost without you, and I am sure you are longing to be back, though you will not admit it. I shall get on capitally, and it will give me something else to think about beside my own private affairs; besides there is Miss Leicester, who is most kind and good to me, and you know you don't care about going out driving with her."

Annette had in fact excused herself under one pretext or another from accompanying Constance. Her eighteen years at St. Malo had completely obliterated any trace of the lady's maid manner Annette had acquired in service; but she felt uncomfortable and out of place at Chester Square, and thought that the girls would enjoy themselves far more without her. Miss Leicester was proving herself a valuable friend to Constance; if she were away they might be drawn even closer together. She said, therefore, after a minute's thought:—

"Well, Constance, as you are going to set out on your own way I do not think it makes much difference whether you begin a little earlier or a little later. As you know very well I am quite ready to stay here as long as I can be in

any way useful to you, and I shall be ready to come over at an hour's notice whenever you want me. Perhaps Mr. Harbut's plan is the best. It is dull, for you are here with nothing to do or to think about, and the change may be for the best; so I shall say nothing more against it."

And so it was settled; a week later Constance Corbyn took up her abode in a Home for Governesses within a quarter of a mile of Chester Square, and Madame Duport returned to St. Malo. Fond as Constance was of her she felt that the change was for the best. It had been dull in the little lodgings during the last three weeks, when they had been inactive. Everything had been said over and over again that could be said about the grand object they had in view. Annette missed the busy life to which she had been accustomed, and sat for hours at a time knitting with scarcely a word passing between her and Constance.

Madame Duport wished now with all her heart that she had more effectually opposed the girl's resolve to set out upon this search, and blamed herself that she had not insisted more strongly upon its hopelessness. Now it seemed to her that the child she had brought up and loved was passing away out of her life altogether, and that instead of marrying and settling down in St. Malo, as she had hoped she was going to do, she would waste her youth in what she felt sure would be a hopeless search. The only thing she had to look forward to was that in time Constance would see this herself, would become tired of the life she was now choosing and would return to St. Malo, and accept the annuity that Mr. Ferris had offered in the name of his client.

"It is all very well to have ideas," she said to herself, "but it is a *betise* to let them ruin your life."

"You will be sure and come back, dearie, as soon as you are convinced that the search is hopeless, won't you? You know that your room will be always ready for you, and how dull the house will be without you, and Victor and I will be longing to have you with us again."

"I will be sure to come back, Annette, when I am convinced that all chances are over; where else should I go to? I do not want to be a wanderer all my life; but you must not expect me soon. I feel convinced that somehow or other, though I cannot see how at present, my mother's memory will be cleared."

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"And you will write often, Constance, and be sure if you are uncomfortable in your first place give it up and come home for a bit and then begin again. It is nothing for you who are a good voyager to run across to St. Malo."

It was Miss Leicester, or rather Miss Leicester's maid, who had discovered the Home for Governesses to which Constance Corbyn went. Constance herself had been with Madame Duport to arrange for her residence there. The Principal, as she called herself, though why, Constance did not understand, was a motherly sort of woman who at once took an interest in the girl, who was younger and of a different type to the majority of her boarders, and she welcomed her when she arrived with a real kindness.

"It is a good hour at which you have arrived, Miss Corbyn, for there are only two of my inmates in. The morning is the time they principally go out to answer advertisements and do their little shopping. I think it is more pleasant to meet strangers gradually than to come upon them all at once. This is the drawing-room."

Constance followed her into a dingy room where two ladies were sitting. One was a dull heavy-eyed woman of five and forty, whose life had been passed in wrestling with troublesome children, and whose face bore traces of the strife. The other was a pale young woman of three or four and twenty.

"Miss Hawkins, Miss Jocelyn, this is a new inmate, Miss Corbyn."

So saying she left them together.

"You have not been out before?" the elder woman asked.

"No," Constance replied, "though I don't know how you knew it."

Miss Hawkins smiled faintly.

"By your face," she said. "Women do not look as you do after they have had even one bout of teaching."

"Is it so very bad, then?" Constance asked.

"Of course, there are exceptions, for every ten women who are inconsiderate, you meet with one who is considerate. For every twenty children who are troublesome and impudent, you may find one who is docile and obedient. I have found the average in each case much smaller, but perhaps I have been unlucky."

"I had no idea it was as bad as that," Constance said. "I am sure that at the school I went to, which was in France, the girls were nothing like as bad as that."

"No, they would not be," Miss Hawkins replied. "Girls at school behave as a rule very much better than girls at home. There they are under the mistress, and know that she can and will punish; at home they see that the governess is snubbed by their mother and is not respected even by the servants. How can you expect then that they will yield her ready obedience? Perhaps you will find it better than I have done. You look as if you would. I should think you would make yourself minded; anyhow you will make a fight for it."

"I am not thinking of going as a governess," Constance said. "I am hoping to obtain a situation as a companion."

"They are much more difficult to get," the younger woman said. "I have been companion for two years, and am now going to try as a junior governess in a school. It is hard work, of course, but it cannot be so hard as that I have been having. I believe sometimes companions' places are very nice, but then you know the competition is awful. I was with a dreadful old woman, who expected me to be nurse, lady's maid, and companion all in one. So that literally I had not a minute to myself from eight o'clock in the morning until eleven at night; and the unkind things she used to say were awful."

Constance looked at this young woman who looked as if she were utterly broken in spirit.

"I have some friends who are looking out for me," she said. "I am sure they would not put me with a woman like that, and if they did I am sure I should not stop there a fortnight."

"Perhaps you can afford to be independent," Miss Hawkins said. "A small income of one's own makes all the difference in our line. If one has something of one's own to fall back upon one can afford to be independent; but a woman who has nothing but what she earns, and knows that she cannot afford to be a month out of place, is in a different position altogether. She must put up with whatever comes. If I had my time to come over again I would never be a governess, but would go as a lady's maid; or if I could not get a place as that as a housemaid. Their position is a hundred times better than ours. They

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have their work and their hours, and their day out and their Sundays, and can change as often as they like and go straight from one place into another. Their life is twenty times as happy as ours if girls would but think so and put their ridiculous pride into their pockets."

"Yes, but what is there to look forward to?" the younger woman said. "I am sure I would fifty times rather be a servant than what I am; but what is there to look forward to? One cannot marry the butcher's young man, or the grocer or the policeman."

"I don't know why one cannot, Miss Jocelyn; it is a mere idea after all, and it strikes me that your life would be a great deal happier one, even if your husband did stand behind a counter and weigh out sugar and raisins, than with the old woman you were talking about. You put up, as you say, with being a lady's maid and nurse as well as companion. Well, a tradesman's wife is quite as good as either a lady's maid or a nurse."

Miss Jocelyn had no argument in readiness to the contrary, but she sighed and shook her head and murmured:—"That it was quite different."

"I think it is quite different," Miss Hawkins said, "and ever so much pleasanter. What do you think, Miss Corbyn?"

"I don't know that I ever thought about it," Constance replied. "Of course if one had to live all one's life with such a person as that I would a thousand times rather teach in some little village school, where at least after school hours I should be my own mistress, independent, and where," and she laughed, "I might hope to win the affections of some young farmer."

"I think you will do, my dear, wherever you are," Miss Hawkins said kindly. "You must not be depressed or dispirited at what Miss Jocelyn or I say. I can see you have good spirits and a brave heart, and will be able to hold your own."

The other inmates now began to return, and fourteen of them were gathered round the table at lunch time. Several of them were bright cheery women, and took, as Constance soon found, a far less gloomy view of their profession than those she had first met. All were interested in the new comer, whose youth and brightness were a novelty in Ebury Street.

"One's life is a good deal what one makes it oneself," one said; "there are some situations where no one could stop for a week, others where anyone might be happy, but between these there are a great many where one's life depends upon oneself. A good many women are bullies, who will respect you if you respect yourself, but who will trample upon you if you have no spirit. In nine cases out of ten, if this sort of woman sees that you know your work, are firm with the children, and mean to be mistress in your own schoolroom, they will leave you alone, and as soon as the children see that their mother respects you they will respect you too."

At three o'clock a vehicle was heard to stop at the door, and a minute later the servant came up with the message that Miss Leicester hoped that Miss Corbyn would go out for a drive with her. As Hilda had promised the day before to call and take her out, Constance was ready except putting on her bonnet and wraps. While she was away doing this some of the others peeped through the window.

"A very handsome carriage and pair, coachman and footman, tiger skin rugs and all the rest of it," one said. "Miss Corbyn has evidently rich friends. I wonder they let her go out."

"She is not likely to be out long," Miss Hawkins said. "I will wager she has a comfortable home of her own before many years are over."

There was a chorus of assent.

"She will have her troubles and her trials," Miss Hawkins went on. "She is altogether too pretty either for a governess or a companion; but I think she will be able to hold her own. She is not a girl to be made a fool of, and has lots of good sense and spirit in that bright face of hers."

"There she goes," one of those at the window said. "She is shaking hands warmly with that pretty girl in the carriage as if they were equals, and they are laughing and chatting like old friends. I wonder who she is and how she comes to be here."

Constance did not stay long in Ebury Street. Ten days after she had gone there Miss Leicester said, when she arrived at the house in Chester Square to spend the day:—

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"Don't take off your things, Constance, the carriage will be at the door in ten minutes."

"Are we going out?" Constance asked in surprise. "You said yesterday that you intended to have a long quiet day at home."

"So I did," Hilda said; "but my plans have been upset. Yesterday evening I saw my aunt, Miss Peyton, she is my mother's sister you know. She is older than my mother, and is as different as two women can be. I often wonder how they came to be sisters. She is a dear little thing, but the most restless person possible. She is always out when she is in town, and that's not very often, only just in the Season. The rest of her time is spent in going the rounds, Harrogate and Scarborough, Brighton, St. Leonard's, Cheltenham, Bath, in fact wherever people are congregating, aunt is sure to be there. I went yesterday to see her and found that she had got a new lady's maid, who was excellent as lady's maid, but as aunt said, 'did not seem to have a tongue in her head, and you know, Hilda, I like a person one can talk to on a wet day.' It was a splendid opening, Constance, and of course I made the most of it.

"'I can't think, my dear aunt, why you don't have a nice lady companion, somebody to sit with and drive with and talk with. I have often thought that it would be so much nicer for you.'

"'I have tried it, my dear,' she said, 'eight or ten times, but I can't get on with that sort of woman; they agree with you whatever you say, and what is the use of talking when a woman always agrees with you. Some of them are shy, and some of them have an expression testifying that they are aggrieved and humiliated, having been born to better things. Some of them are stupid, some are lachrymose; some, which is worse still, have a perpetual smile on their face. I am not good-tempered, Hilda, and fly into rages with them. None of them stop with me more than three weeks, and yet every one of them was guaranteed to me to be a treasure.'

"'You have evidently got hold of the wrong persons, auntie,' I said. 'You want someone bright and young and pleasant. Someone whom you would treat as an equal and who would treat you as an equal; who would contradict you when you were wrong and amuse you when you were

dull, and play and sing to you when you felt disposed that way ; and in fact be a friend and companion in reality.'

" 'Where is such a treasure as that to be met with, Hilda ?' my aunt said, laughing. 'Are you thinking of taking the situation ?'

" 'No ; but I have a friend who would be the very thing for you. She is young and has good spirits, and is clever and pretty, and a lady.'

" 'Oh, Hilda, how could you say all that ?'

" 'I said what was perfectly true, Constance. 'Are you quite in earnest, child ?' my aunt asked.

" 'Perfectly, aunt. I am very, very much interested in her, and very fond of her, and as it happens that she, from what I consider a silly freak, has made up her mind to go as companion to a lady, it seems to me that you were made for each other.'

" 'But who is she, Hilda ?'

" 'She is a lady, aunt, and she is an orphan, and she has been educated in France, and literally knows no one in this country ; she has a home in France she can go to if she likes, but she has a particular wish to stay in England for a time. I thought of you directly.'

" 'Is she that girl I saw you driving with the other day in the Park, Hilda ?'

" 'I nodded. I won't say, Constance, what she said of you, as it might make you conceited. However, she said I was to bring you to-day to have a chat with her. She is really a dear old lady, accustomed, no doubt, to have her own way, having been always her own mistress ; but a dear kind-hearted old soul. Shrewd too. She affects to be rather cynical, and I should think she has seen enough of life to make her so in reality. Here we are.'

The carriage stopped at a house in South Audley Street, and Constance, feeling a little nervous, followed her friend upstairs into the drawing-room, where an elderly lady was sitting by the fire.

" 'Well, aunt, here we are. This is my friend Miss Corbyn.'

Miss Peyton held out her hand to Constance. She was just what Constance had pictured she would be. Rather a short woman, with a slight, girlish figure ; her hair had been dark, but was now thickly streaked with grey ; her eyes were sharp and bright, her mouth firm, but with a

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kindly smile. She had, as Constance found, when she began to talk, a sharp decided way of speaking, and she could understand when Hilda told her afterwards that most people were a little afraid of Miss Peyton ; but Constance did not feel afraid, the little smile which passed across Miss Peyton's lips as her eyes fell upon her set her at her ease, and assured her that the description that Hilda had given of her was a correct one.

"Well, child," she began, "so you have taken it into your head that you would like to be a companion to an old woman?"

Miss Peyton was in fact not yet past sixty, but she generally spoke of herself as an old woman, although younger in manner than many ten years her junior.

"I should like to be a companion, Miss Peyton, with anyone with whom I could get on comfortably."

"Ah ; and are you aware of the duties of a companion?"

"Not at all, Miss Peyton ; my idea is that the chief duty of a companion would be to be companionable."

"That is a very good answer," Miss Peyton said, "and reminds me of Sydney Smith's definition of an archdeacon, that he was a man who discharged archidiaconal functions. Hilda rather hinted that you expected to be treated as a friend. You see, my dear, in a matter of this kind one must treat things on a business footing."

"Just so, Miss Peyton. I can assure you that the suggestion is Miss Leicester's and not mine. I am quite ready to do all that a companion generally does, whatever it may be ; but it certainly seems to me that a person would be a very poor companion who was not also a friend. I should be content to be a companion, but it certainly seems to me that to be a good companion one must be more than merely a paid servant."

"I think you are right, my dear, and that perhaps the failures I have made with people who came to be companions was because we did not start on that sort of footing at all. It would certainly be a pleasant experiment to make. And how about salary?"

Constance flushed.

"Business, Miss Corbyn," Miss Peyton said sharply. "We must keep to business."

"The salary is altogether a secondary consideration with me, Miss Peyton. I want to stay in England for a time,

and I cannot very well live here by myself, and I should like, if I could, to avoid being an expense to my friends in France. I must, of course, dress well if I am to go about with you ; but as I make my own dresses that would not cost me a great deal. I should think thirty pounds a year would be ample."

"I should think not," Miss Peyton said sharply. "However, I see there will be no difficulty on that score. I see you are in deep mourning."

"Yes ; I lost my father not long ago."

Miss Peyton looked sharply at her. There were no signs of recent grief in the clear eyes, nor of depression in the curves of the face and mouth. Whoever he was, she said to herself, she did not care for him ; he must have been a very bad lot if he could not make her like him.

"May I know a little bit more about you, Miss Corbyn ?" she asked. "My niece's recommendation is of course ample in its way, but if we are to be friends, and I think," she said with her pleasant smile again, "there will be no great difficulty in being friends with you, it is better to know as much as one can of each other, so as to avoid treading upon each other's corns."

Constance looked at Miss Leicester.

"I do not see why you should not know," she said. "Indeed, I think that it would be better you should know."

"You know all about it, Hilda, of course ?" Miss Peyton asked.

"Yes, aunt."

"Then, I think, my dear, it will be more pleasant for Miss Corbyn for you to tell me the story. Not now, but if you can find time to come round again to-morrow."

"Certainly, aunt. I will bring Robert with me if I may ; he is Miss Corbyn's adviser, and as I have only heard it from him he can tell you a great deal better than I can all about it."

Miss Peyton smiled.

"Bring him with you by all means, Hilda, you know I like him. It always refreshes me to have a chat with him, which is more than I can say of young men in general. Most of those I meet go very far to confirm Darwin's theory about our having an ape among our ancestors. Well, child," she went on, turning again to Constance, "you shall have an answer from me the day after to-morrow. I

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warn you that I am a very ill-tempered old woman, and that when things go wrong I shall snap and snarl at you most unmercifully, and that I have never yet kept a companion beyond a fortnight. Are you ready to risk all that?"

"I think so, Miss Peyton," Constance said with a slight smile. "I have not told you my faults yet, but you will find them out soon enough if you agree to take me."

"Well, what do you think of her?" Miss Leicester asked as they took their seats in the carriage again.

"I think you described her admirably, and I am sure I shall like her if she can like me. I think if she didn't like one she would be a little hard to get on with."

"Very hard," Hilda said emphatically. "She can hit very hard I can tell you when she chooses, and when she doesn't like any one she makes no pretence of concealing her feelings. She knows every one, going about as she does; and what is more, she seems to know everything about everyone. It is absolutely wonderful to me how she carries it in her head. As a rule she is very much liked, but those who dislike her dislike her heartily, and perhaps with some reason. I have not the least fear in the world about your getting on with her."

"Then you think she will take me?"

"Think? I feel sure of it. I consider it will be the best thing in the world for her. I am sure it must be very dull for her at times in these places she goes to. One cannot be always out, you know, or having people in to see you. She reads a great deal, and makes me quite ashamed sometimes of my own ignorance when she gets on the subject of books. Still at times she must feel lonely, and it will do her a world of good having you with her."

The next morning Hilda drove to South Audley Street, having written to Robert Harbut to meet her there. She was the first to arrive.

"Well, aunt, what do think of my paragon?"

"I am pleased with her, Hilda, very pleased. Of course I have had no opportunity at present of knowing anything about her accomplishments; but I can see that she is a clever girl and a good girl. What I like most in her was that she was not afraid of me, not a bit. She is, as you say, distinctly a lady, and would make a sensation anywhere. So Master Robert introduced her to you?"

"Yes, aunt."

"He knew her before you did?"

"Yes, aunt; not very long. He introduced her to me a few days after she came over from France."

"And you were not disposed to feel jealous, Hilda, of this very pleasing young lady?"

"Not a bit," Hilda said stoutly. "It never entered my mind."

"Well, my dear, that is creditable alike to you and to Robert Harbut. And now who is this girl and where does she spring from, and what's her story, for I know without your telling me that she must have a story. She has not been crossed in love I am sure by her face, and she did not care for her father, I could see that; and how is it that she was brought up in France and is so thoroughly English in her manner?"

"Here is Robert, aunt, he will answer all your questions; it is much better that you should get the story first-hand. I wrote to you, Robert, to come here," she went on, as he was shaking hands with Miss Peyton, "in order that you might tell aunt all about Constance Corbyn. Constance has given me leave to tell her her story."

"In which," Miss Peyton put in, "I am quite sure beforehand that there is nothing for her to be ashamed of."

"Not at all, Miss Peyton. The only person who comes badly out of the matter is her father."

"So I fancied," Miss Peyton said. "When a girl has a story, other than a love story, in nine cases out of ten the father is to blame. Now sit down."

"And you think this leaf was cut out of the register by the father?" she said, when he had finished the story.

"I have very little doubt about it; in fact I don't see who else could have done it, as Ferris assured me that young Clitheroe would throw no obstacle whatever in the way of Miss Corbyn if she were in a position to prove the case. I don't know him personally, but Ferris speaks of him as a frank, pleasant fellow, who was ready to make very liberal provision for the young lady, and I do not for a moment suspect that there would be any foul play from that side. Besides he has a fair position already. He is owner of a small estate, which has been in the family a great many years, and occupies a good position in the county. He would be nothing short of a fool to risk all this by commit-

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ting a felony. No, I have no question that Algernon Corbyn cut the leaf out, or got some one to cut it out for him. He did it, no doubt, after his wife's death, and had she lived he would have declared his marriage at the first opportunity. After she was gone he determined to suppress the thing altogether. He probably had in his possession an original copy of the register, and so had it in his power to prove his daughter heiress of the Court at any time if he should change his mind. There would be his own statement, backed, if necessary, by the copy of the register, and no one would be likely to go to Folkestone to examine the original."

"In that case this copy ought to have been found among his papers," Miss Peyton said.

"A slip of paper like that might have been hidden anywhere, and certainly would not have been placed with his ordinary papers."

"Well, he must have been a very bad fellow: a worthless, heartless man," Miss Peyton said decisively. "However, we need not discuss his character; the point that interests me is this girl whom my niece has pretty well entrapped me into taking as my companion."

"It was for your own good, aunt, as well as hers, and you know very well that, whatever I said about her, you would not have taken her unless you had liked her."

"Well, of course, this story will give me an extra interest in her, Hilda. As you say I do like her, and think it will make a pleasant change to have a girl like that with me. At any rate she will not be like her predecessors, and will, I see, speak out her mind freely, and anyhow, if we don't suit each other, we can part. You can tell her, Hilda, that I have decided to conclude the arrangement with her. Of course I shall write formally to her myself. Hint to her, or rather tell her plainly, for I hate hints, that I would wish her to lay aside that heavy mourning. Of course, if she had any reason to love her father and was grieving for him at heart, it would be different; but as she cannot do so, and as no one knows her or knows that she has lost a relative, half-mourning will be quite sufficient. You see in the first place it is not cheerful having a person about one in deep mourning; in the second people ask questions, and I don't like questions. Tell her I like people about me to be nicely dressed, and that the thirty pounds she spoke of

is simply absurd ; I pay my lady's maid more. We will say sixty pounds, that will be fifty for her clothes and ten pounds for pocket-money, which will be enough, as she will have no necessary expenses whatever. She may as well come to me this day week, which will be the first of March, that will give her time to get her things made. As this will be an extra expense altogether, of course that is my business. So do you take her to my dressmaker, Hilda, you have been there with me and she knows you. Tell her to make four dresses, a simple dress for travelling, one for walking, and one for ordinary wear, and a dinner dress. Tell the woman to send in the account to me ; and get her a couple of bonnets, and mantles and things. If she is, as you have settled, to pass as my friend she must be dressed accordingly. You will inform her that this is no question of obligation, but of strict business. If I am, at my time of life, to be provided with a doll, of course I must pay for dressing it."

"Shall I put it to her in those words, auntie ?" Miss Leicester said laughing.

"You can put it in any words you like, Hilda. Now I have no doubt but Mr. Harbut wants to be off to his business, so he can go ; but you can take off your bonnet and stay with me to lunch. It is not very often you find time to stop an hour with me, and after wheedling me into complying with this whim of yours, and transferring all the trouble of this young woman on to my shoulders, the least you can do is to give me the morning."

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CHAPTER IX.

A WEEK later Constance Corbyn arrived at Miss Peyton's. Miss Leicester brought her in her carriage ; her boxes were to be sent by carrier. This had been done at Miss Peyton's own suggestion.

"I have told my maid that a young friend of mine is coming to stay with me for a time," she said, "and it is just as well that she should come with you. You know what servants are ; if they once get an idea that she is a paid companion they will be jealous of her and will show their spite in all sorts of little mean ways ; therefore it is just as well they should be kept in the dark on the subject."

Miss Peyton gave a little approving nod at the appearance of Constance in her quiet half-mourning dress.

"That will do very nicely, my dear, and I am obliged to you for giving way to an old woman's fancies."

"You are very kind and good, Miss Peyton," Constance said gratefully.

"Tut, tut, my dear, I please myself. Hilda, take your friend up to her room ; it is next to mine you know. You are going to stop to lunch I hope."

Constance felt in a day or two quite at home at Miss Peyton's ; her absolute duties were very slight. She went out with her shopping or in her broughman, for Miss Peyton jobbed a carriage while in town, saying that horses and a coachman were much too troublesome for a single woman. Constance offered to read to her the first morning after breakfast, but Miss Peyton decidedly declined the offer.

"I can see perfectly well, my dear, and when I can't I shall take to glasses. How anyone can put up with being read to when they can read themselves is more than I can understand. In the first place, being read to makes you sleepy, which is one of the most disagreeable sensations possible, and in the second place, when I read myself I can get through the paper in half an hour, and see all there

is worth seeing, whereas a reader has to go on conscientiously, and your time is wasted by listening to a quantity of things in which you have no interest at all. It is just the same with books, some parts you want to read attentively, then you come to a dozen pages of padding which can be skipped with advantage. This morning I want to read, and you can either read or work or go up and practice on the piano, just as you like. This afternoon you shall go with me to Boosey's and we will get some old-fashioned English songs. Those things you sung last night were very nice, but I don't care either for Italian or French; our old English songs are worth a bookful of them in my opinion. Of an afternoon we shall be mostly out, and of an evening you must amuse yourself as you best can, for I am out five nights out of six. I dare say you wonder why I do it, and think that I should be more comfortable at home at my age. Perhaps I should have been if I always had someone like yourself to make my home a little cheerful; but it is dull work sitting alone, and besides I really like seeing what is going on around me, and watching the play."

Constance enjoyed the afternoon drives much, especially when there were no calls to make. Miss Peyton knew every one and had something amusing and caustic to say about the occupants of nearly every carriage they met. When she did make calls she expected Constance to accompany her upstairs, and always introduced her as my friend, Miss Corbyn, and people generally supposed that she was some friend on a visit, and wondered a little who this pretty girl could be, but Miss Peyton was not a lady to be questioned, and it was assumed that it was some girl whom she had become acquainted with in her many absences from London. She was several times included in the invitations to Miss Peyton, but the latter, in accepting for herself, stated that Miss Corbyn had not yet come out, and for the present did not go into society.

"I am afraid I am very useless to you, Miss Peyton," Constance said one day after she had been six weeks in South Audley Street. "I feel that I am here under false pretences altogether."

"I am quite satisfied, my dear, if you are. The house is much more cheerful than it was. I have always someone to talk to when I want to talk, and I can be silent when I

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like. A house is a poor place without young people in it, and I was telling Hilda only yesterday that I wondered I have been content to go on by myself alone, and that I was really obliged to her for having provided you for my comfort. So you need not be in the least uneasy. You have come as my companion and you are my companion, and I am quite contented with you, and there is nothing more to be said about it. If I have any reason to be dissatisfied you will hear it quickly enough."

"I am getting very tired of London," Miss Peyton said a day or two later. "I have had nearly three months of it, and three months is as much as I can stand; we will be off for a bit, and come back in the middle of June. The question is, Where shall we go to first? I think we will move West. One does not feel the east winds down in Devonshire; but on the way I think we will stop at Bath for a fortnight, at any rate; I am sure to find lots of people I know there, and we may possibly unite business with pleasure. Of course, I am very interested in your story, my dear; and when we are down there, and hear all the gossip of the place, we may pick up something that may be useful to you. I should like to see this young Clitheroe, and judge for myself what sort of a man he is. Altogether it will give an interest to our visit. What do you say?"

"I should like it very much, Miss Peyton. Bath seems the only place where there is a chance of my obtaining any clue that can help me at all. I don't see which way it is to come from; but if it is to be got anywhere it is there. It is very kind of you to think of it."

"It will be an amusement," Miss Peyton said, briskly, "As to finding a clue one can never tell, this sort of thing almost always turns up accidentally; at any rate, we shall learn a little more about Mr. Corbyn's ways and character than we know at present. We will start to-morrow. You had better take my engagement book and write a batch of notes saying that I am leaving town, and regret I shall not be able to keep my engagement. People are pretty well accustomed to my ways by this time, for when I make up my mind I never waste time over it. Look out the trains in Bradshaw at once and I will tell Miriam to pack up. I will write a telegram to the people where I always lodge asking if I can have a sitting-room and three bedrooms,

and if not they must find me them somewhere. There is nothing so hateful as looking for lodgings. I like to drop in and find cosy fires and warm rooms, and a snug luncheon ready for me. There is no reason in the world why one should not be comfortable if it can be managed with a little trouble. We need not put that in the telegram; if we write by this afternoon's post they will have plenty of time to get everything in readiness before we arrive."

"I have been thinking," Miss Peyton said, as they were on the road to Bath on the following day, "that it would be just as well that your name should not be known; it is not at all a common one, and of course we do not want to provoke comment. Therefore, whenever it may be absolutely necessary to mention a name, I shall call you Miss Constance. I don't know that I ever did meet a family of that name, but there is no reason why one should not exist."

"Very well, Miss Peyton, I think it would be prudent; especially if we happen to meet Mr. Clitheroe, or any of his relations, only it might be rather awkward if some of the people to whom you have introduced me as Miss Corbyn should be staying down here."

"It is not likely, my dear. People don't go out of town much in April."

Miss Peyton had sent down very particular instructions on the previous day, and everything was ready for her on their arrival.

"There, my dear," she said, as she sat down to lunch, "I call this comfort. If we had trusted to chance the utmost one could have got would have been a chop cooked in a hurry, and we should have had to wait an hour for that. Now, with this bright fire and luncheon five minutes after we come in, one feels at home. I like to wander about, but I like to carry home with me."

Luncheon over, Miss Peyton said, "Now, we will go down to the pump rooms, and I will put my name down in the visitors' book, and see who is here, though I am pretty sure to meet some people I know. Everybody goes to the pump room in the afternoon; a very good band plays there, and it serves as an excuse for people to go and meet each other. I always drink the waters when I come down from London. After a course of three months of dinners, one's constitution wants a little assistance, and

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As Miss Peyton expected, she met several people whom she knew, and was soon in full conversation with them, Constance quietly seating herself and watching the scene to which she had been too preoccupied on the occasion of her last visit to Bath to pay much attention. The music was very good, but it was evident the great majority of those present paid very little attention to it, and the buzz of low talk continued unbroken during the performance of the pieces.

"I suppose you are alone, as usual, Miss Peyton?" she heard the lady sitting next to her say.

"No; for once I am not alone, I have a young friend with me. She has been staying for a short time with me in town, and when I got tired of the place I brought her down here with me."

"Anyone I know?"

"No, I think not. She is a Miss Corbyn, and her friends do not live in London. Let me introduce her to you. She is almost the same age as your daughter."

In the course of the next two hours Constance was introduced to several people, and always in her right name. Miss Peyton said afterwards, "These people are all Londoners, Constance, before I introduced you I found out that they knew none of the local people, so that it is better to introduce you under your right name, as you will very likely meet them again in town. I have not put your name down at all in the visitors' book, only my own; so that it won't get into the local papers."

A fortnight passed away, Miss Peyton enjoying herself thoroughly. She drank the water, looked over the papers in the pump room, chatted for an hour or two with acquaintances, and then went for an hour's walk with Constance. In the afternoon they went for a drive the first thing after lunch, listened an hour to the band, and then went back to their lodgings. Here almost every evening Miss Peyton had two or three friends to dine. These dinners were very cosy little affairs; the cooking being excellent and the wine good. Miss Peyton was a capital hostess, and although Constance knew none of the people whose doings were discussed, and whose peculiarities were laughed at, she enjoyed them much. She had never

heard conversation of this sort before, it seemed to her at times a little ill-natured, but it was certainly amusing. The visitors were for the most part gentlemen.

"Women do not appreciate a good dinner, my dear, as men do," Miss Peyton said to her one day; "besides, I have a motive for asking most of the men who have been here. Several of them, as you have noticed, are military men, and just at present they are more likely to be useful than anyone else."

"Useful? Miss Peyton."

"Certainly. We have come down here partly on your business, haven't we? I have not forgotten about it, though I daresay you have suspected that I have."

"I did not at all think you had forgotten, Miss Peyton, but I did not see in the least how you could do anything."

"I do not know that we can, my dear, but I am trying, and it is for that reason that I am specially cultivating military men down here."

Constance looked surprised.

"My dear, Bath swarms with military men and Indian officials, and that sort of people, who settle here either because the place suits their constitutions, or, more frequently, because there are a number of their friends here, and they form a sort of colony, and get together and talk over their regiments or their districts, or what not, with each other at the clubs, and play whist to their hearts' content. These people, of course, get to know the county folk and hear the gossip of the town. Now, as a rule, very few of our set in London have any acquaintances among the residents here, but when men like Colonel Forsyth and General Bangles and Major Hersee come down here to drink the waters for their gout they find a host of acquaintances among the military settlers. So through them we may hear of something about your people. I told Colonel Forsyth and the General that I want to know something about the Clitheroes, as I have heard of them from a friend of mine, and should be glad if they could get me any information about them. I think from the way I put it they fancied that perhaps my friend had met young Clitheroe in London, and, having daughters, wants to know what his standing was down here. The general told me this evening, while you were playing, that he had heard at the Club that young Clitheroe had just come in for a very fine estate

on the death of an uncle, who had been thrown from his gig and killed some three months ago. Everyone speaks well of him. They say he is a nice, straightforward young fellow, full of life and spirits, and would have made a first-rate cavalry officer. His mother does not seem to be so popular, though General Bangles said he heard that she was a 'ducid' fine woman.

"You need not look surprised, my dear, that is exactly what he said. No doubt he considers it to be a very high commendation; he said she was one of the leaders of society here, and thinks a good deal of herself. She seems as little like her son as possible, being stiff and cold; she can be pleasant when she chooses, but is able to be quite the contrary on occasion. The general said she was sister of the man who was killed a few months ago, and who was not only wealthy, but was the head of one of the oldest families in the county, and that she prided herself a good deal more upon having been born a Corbyn than of having married Clitheroe, although the Clitheroes were an old family too, but their position in the county was by no means equal to that of the Corbyns. They say she is generally known by the nickname of the countess, and the general opinion is that her son having come into this fortune is a matter of much greater gratification to her than to him. There is nothing very new in all this, my dear, but I may hear more presently."

The next day, when they were sitting in the pump room listening to the music, General Bangles came up to Miss Peyton in one of the pauses in music.

"You were asking about the Clitheroes, Miss Peyton," he said, as he took his seat by her, "my friend Fairbrother has just pointed them out to me. They are that lady in mourning in the front row and the young man with her; it is the first time they have been here since her brother's death. I thought as you seemed to have an interest in them you might like to see them."

"Thank you, general, I have no interest in them personally; still I should like to see what he is like."

Constance heard what was said and looked eagerly across at the persons pointed out. Their backs were turned to her, so she could see nothing of their faces, and she waited anxiously for the programme to come to an end. As soon as it was over there was a general move,

and as Mrs. Clitheroe and her son stood up several friends gathered round them, and they stood there talking for ten minutes before they left the hall: Miss Peyton and Constance had therefore full opportunity for examining them.

"A fine-looking young fellow," Miss Peyton said, as after the knot had broken up they turned away, and passing in front of the Abbey Church started for their usual walk before returning to their lodgings, "a very pleasant face and soldierly carriage. The general said he was a captain in the Yeomanry here, and I suppose they give them a certain amount of drill. It seems to me, my dear, that there might be a much more satisfactory way of settling this difficulty than by the aid of the law."

She spoke meaningly, and Constance understood her. The girl flushed up hotly.

"You don't think, Miss Peyton, that even supposing—even supposing that we met each other and he were to offer me to marry him, which would be the most unlikely thing possible, that I would marry into a family like that, unless my mother's name were cleared; I would sooner beg in the streets."

"Tut, tut, my dear," Miss Peyton said, sharply, "it seems to me that you are as proud in your way as they say Mrs. Clitheroe is in hers. You have no legal proofs as to this marriage of your mother's, but you have strong moral proofs, and nine people out of ten who heard your story would be of opinion that the probabilities were in favor of the marriage having taken place. And what did you think of your aunt?" she went on, abruptly changing the subject.

Constance laughed. "I had not thought of her as my aunt until you said so, Miss Peyton. I have always thought of him as my cousin, because you see I could not help feeling that it would be hard for him if after naturally regarding himself as my father's heir he found that he was mistaken; but I never thought of her as my aunt, and I do not want to think of her so in the future. I did not like her face at all. She has thin lips and a cold sort of eyes. No, I do not like her a bit. What did you think of her, Miss Peyton?"

"It is not easy to know what to think of a woman like that at first sight," Miss Peyton said, slowly; "one is so liable to be mistaken. As to her being cold and proud one

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can see that at once—that is on the surface. I should say that she was a clever woman, too. She certainly has a striking figure ; I don't know what her husband was like, but I am sorry for him, whoever he was. I should say that she was ambitious, and I feel more or less certain she would be unscrupulous—that sort of woman with sandy hair and thin lips and cold grey eyes is my particular aversion, and therefore I am perhaps a little prejudiced. If you had both lived two or three hundred years ago in Italy I should have said to you, don't eat anything she can have touched, don't accept a flower or a fan that she could have had the handling of. Never stir out of your house after dark without an armed escort, and always see to the fastenings of your door and window before you went to sleep."

"Oh, Miss Peyton, how dreadful of you ; you don't mean to say that you think——" and she stopped.

"That she would put you out of her way. I only say, my dear, that I would not give her the chance. Remember that I admit I am prejudiced, but that is distinctly my impression."

Constance laughed.

"Well, Miss Peyton, fortunately we don't live in Italy three hundred years ago, and people in our days don't put poison in flowers or hire bravos, but content themselves with fighting in the law courts, besides she may not even know of my existence."

"Perhaps not, my dear, I doubt if she would be a party to any compromise, and I own that I regard her as an obstacle to the little plan I just hinted at."

"She would certainly not make a nice mother-in-law, but other people evidently do not think of her as you do, Miss Peyton, because you know General Bangles said she was a leader of society here, which shows that people cannot dislike her."

Miss Peyton shook her head decidedly. "It is evident, Constance, that you know nothing about it. Some women owe their position as leaders to their birth, or their manner, or their popularity ; others are leaders because they seize the position and no one is bold enough to contest it. I could name half a dozen women in London who are universally disliked, but whom nobody cares, or dares, if you like, to oppose. We are most of us moral cowards and

shrink from a fight, and though we may grumble under our breath we go with the majority, and submit to the dictations of people of whose tongues we are afraid. Well at any rate, my dear, you have gained something by our visit to Bath. You have seen your relations. By the way," she said abruptly, "I am expecting visitors to-morrow."

"Is there anything I can do, Miss Peyton?"

"Nothing, my dear; Mrs. Allen will see to all that. I wrote two days ago to my niece, Hilda, asking her to come down for three or four days, and to bring Robert Harbut with her; and had a letter this morning saying that they will both come to-morrow."

Constance uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"I don't particularly want Hilda," Miss Peyton went on, "now I have got you. Besides, I am accustomed to be altogether alone. But you see we cannot get on very well with your business without a man. I cannot ask questions about Mr. Corbyn, and it is really about him we want to learn. If Robert has his wits about him, he might find out something. I will introduce him to General Bangles and Colonel Forsyth, and they will put him up at the Club, and he ought to be able to bring the conversation round to the subject."

"It is extremely kind of you, Miss Peyton."

"Not at all, my dear. I have got interested in the matter myself. Besides, I want to see if Robert has got his wits about him, as Hilda insists. I am not going to leave my money to a young couple who are likely to make ducks and drakes of it, and this is a fine opportunity for him to show what there is in him. So you see I am acting quite as much in my own behalf as in yours."

The next day they drove to the railway station and met Miss Leicester and Robert.

"I knew that you would get quite as interested in this search as we are, aunty," Hilda said, as they drove away from the station.

"What search are you speaking of, Hilda?"

"It is of no use to plead unconsciousness, aunty. If you had asked me down by myself, I should have thought it was because you so missed my society, that at the end of a fortnight you felt it necessary to your happiness to have me here, but that little dream was dissipated by your asking Robert."

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"Perhaps I knew that you wouldn't come without him, child."

"Not a bit of it, aunty. I said to Robert at once, 'Those two have done nothing down at Bath, and now they want you to take it up, Robert.'"

"Well, I own, child, there is something in what you say. It seems to me that the detective spirit is latent in us all, and that if we once get interested in a case we are fascinated by it. Robert has, in any case, chiefly to thank you for my having brought him down here."

"How me, aunty?"

"Well, my dear, you have so often told me what great things he would do, if he had the chance, that I naturally turned to him in our difficulty. But really, Robert, I have brought you down as a sort of forlorn hope. You see as a woman I cannot go about asking all sorts of questions about Mr. Corbyn. Nor, I own, do I see what sort of questions I should ask had I the opportunity. I have thought it over in every way, and cannot see in what direction we ought to search."

"Well, aunty," Hilda said, laughingly, "that is exactly the conclusion we arrived at when we first told you the story three months ago."

"I know that, my dear," Miss Peyton said irritably, "but in three months ideas ought to come to people. Of course there must be some way if we could only hit upon it. I think it is very stupid of us four that we are no further forward. But here we are at our lodgings, we will talk it over after lunch. There is no worse habit than of talking seriously at your meals, it interferes sadly with the process of digestion, while gossip about your neighbors' affairs, ill-natured remarks about absent people, and small chit-chat give a piquancy to a meal, and add to its flavor, so let us put this matter aside until we have done, especially as Mrs. Allen has prepared something extra in honor of your coming."

Accordingly the talk turned on people in town and Hilda's doings since they had last met.

"Now, Robert," Miss Peyton said, when the meal was over, "we can turn our thoughts to business. My ideas do not extend far. I have got General Bangles and Colonel Forsyth to ask some friends to put your name up at the club; that was to be done this morning. General

Bangles will come here at three o'clock, and will go there with you and introduce you to people. Then, if you have any gumption, you can bring the conversation round to the subject of the accident to Mr. Corbyn. I have asked the general specially to introduce you to some old residents here, as you wanted to get some information about someone or other who lived here some time back."

"Yes, Miss Peyton," Robert Harbut said, smiling, "so far it is all clear, but the point is what sort of questions I am to ask about Mr. Corbyn."

"I don't see, Robert," Miss Peyton said, indignantly, "what is the use of your being a barrister if you can see no further in the matter than an old woman like me. You know what your object is, and you ought to know upon what line you should conduct your cross-examination so as to get at what you want."

"It may be that I ought to know, Miss Peyton, but I certainly don't. However, I will endeavor to get men to talk of Mr. Corbyn, and trust to chance to glean some little item of information that may turn out useful. There is no doubt that the great majority of discoveries that are made are made by chance, and that if people will but talk they are sure sooner or later to drop something which will throw a fresh light on the subject. I am vexed and annoyed with myself that I have not been able to see a way out of our difficulty, and when I received your invitation was really very glad that I should have an opportunity of trying to get on to the scent again. The smoking-room of a club, especially of a local club, is just the place for getting hold of pieces of gossip. I am not much of a club man myself. Any spare time I have your niece peremptorily claims, but I am quite prepared for the next few days to pass the greater part of my time in the smoking-room here, and to leave you three ladies to go about the country in the character of unprotected females."

"I am so sorry to trouble you all," Constance Corbyn broke out.

"It is no trouble to any of us," Miss Peyton said, "and I can assure you that you needn't worry yourself about it. It is as much for our own sakes as yours that we want to get at the bottom of the matter. We have taken it up, and have got interested in it, and do not like acknowledging ourselves beaten. Robert Harbut regards the matter as

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a point of professional honor to begin with and he wants to please Hilda, and at the same time to convince her friends as well as herself that he possesses no ordinary sagacity. Hilda wants him to succeed partly no doubt for your sake, but partly also that there will be some justification for her faith in Robert's abilities, and I want him to succeed because, apart from my interest in you, I have an interest in the case, and have thought so much over it in every light that it would be a serious disappointment to me if we failed to get to the bottom of it. There is the General's knock, as soon as you have gone off with him, Robert, we will go for a walk."

Robert made a grimace. "I feel like a bad boy that is kept in, Miss Peyton, while the others are off to the cricket field. However, I know of old that it is no use arguing with you."

Robert was duly introduced to General Bangles. The latter, after a short chat, went away with him to the club. Here he spent the greater part of the next two days, and with an adroitness which would have excited Miss Peyton's admiration had she heard him, he several times turned the subject of conversation to Algernon Corbyn's accident, and learned incidentally a good deal about that gentleman's character and habits. On the third evening after his arrival in Bath, he was chatting with General Bangles and Major Rothsay, a resident at Bath, in a quiet corner of the smoking-room, when the latter startled him by saying:—

"You were talking about Corbyn this afternoon, Bangles. Do you know I was an intimate friend of his at one time? I was at the same college with him at Oxford, and we were on the same staircase. His rooms were over mine, which was perhaps lucky for him. He was one of those quiet old fellows who don't do anything in particular, who neither read nor row, nor play cricket nor drink, so that he never used to have noisy parties over my head, while I was rather racketty in those days, and he would have fared badly if his rooms had been under mine instead of above. As it was, he used to grumble a good deal. We left college at the same time, and a rather rum thing happened a year or two afterwards. This is quite between ourselves, you know, for he lived in the highest odor of respectability down here. I was knocking about on the

continent, just before I got my commission, which I got later than usual, for my father had set his mind on my going into his office, and settling down into a lawyer. I kicked against this, and it was not until he saw that the case was quite hopeless that he gave in.

"Well, I was at Cremona, an out-of-the-way place where very few English tourists go; and no wonder, for, except that some fellow or other made fiddles there, I don't know what attraction there was in the place. However I got there somehow; and the next morning, while standing on the steps of the hotel, who should come out but Corbyn, with an uncommonly good-looking young woman. He flushed up suddenly when he saw me, and looked completely taken aback. I saw that he was hesitating whether to recognize me or not; but I suppose he saw no way out of it, so he shook hands, and introduced the lady as Mrs. Corbyn. I dined with them afterwards. She was a pleasant, lady-like woman, and not at all fast, either in appearance or manner.

"After she had gone out of the room he said to me: 'By-the-way, Rothsay, you need not mention to anyone you met me here with my wife; my marriage not generally known yet you see, a private sort of affair.' Of course, I said that I would hold my tongue on the subject; but I could see he was a good deal relieved when I mentioned afterwards that I was expecting every day to hear that I was gazetted into a cavalry regiment, and I had applied for the 15th Hussars, who were on the point of starting for India. I never met him again until I came down here seven or eight months ago to live. He had forgotten me till I spoke to him one day here.

"I could see that at first the recognition was a deucedly unpleasant one to him; however, we neither of us alluded to the subject of our last meeting. I afterwards learned, of course, that he was a single man and had never been married. They had been traveling together some months before I met them. I learned that by running against a fellow in the corridor of the hotel who had been our scout at college. I had a chat with him for a minute or two, and he told me he had been traveling as a sort of valet and courier with Corbyn ever since he left England. He did not seem to want to talk, so of course I did not ask any questions, it was Corbyn's affair, not mine, and I certainly

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thought at the time they were married, though, by his confusion and his asking me to say nothing about it, I guessed there was something irregular in the business. But of course when I came here and heard that he had never been married, I saw how matters stood.

"Rum, isn't it, how the last sort of men you would be likely to suspect—and I should certainly never have suspected Corbyn—go in for this sort of thing, when they think it safe to do so. Of course I should never think of telling this to anyone down here. He died in the odor of sanctity, and though I don't suppose he was a bit worse than the rest of us, I have a quiet smile to myself sometimes when I hear them talking about him."

General Bangles related three or four stories apropos of that which he had just heard, and then Robert made an excuse to leave them and hurried back to the lodgings.

CHAPTER X.

THE ladies were just sitting down to supper when Robert Harbut burst in upon them.

"Dear me, Robert, how you startle one," Miss Peyton said, as he suddenly opened the door and ran in.

"Don't sit down, Miss Peyton; for goodness sake don't sit down, or I know I shall be obliged to keep my news until you have finished supper, and to do so would be fatal to me."

"What is your news, Robert," Miss Leicester asked quickly, while Constance looked anxiously at him.

"My news is this—I have got a clue."

An exclamation of surprise and pleasure broke from his hearers.

"It was quite accidental," he went on; "but I have learnt by a most singular chance who the man was who accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Corbyn on the Continent. I have not got his name, but that will be easy to discover, for I have learnt that he served as Mr. Corbyn's scout at Oxford; so I should say there will be no difficulty whatever in getting his name from the College books."

"But how did you find that out?" Miss Peyton asked.

"By the extraordinary piece of luck of coming across probably the only man who could give me the information," and Robert then repeated the story he heard.

"That is singular, indeed," Miss Peyton said when he finished; "downright providential. Now we have only to find out the man's name, and then to find him."

"The second part of the affair will be more difficult than the first," Robert said. "However, I imagine that most of the scouts are natives of Oxford; their fathers have been scouts before them, or in some way connected with the college, so we may hope that if we do not find the man himself living there now, we may find some of his people and learn where he now is if alive. I say if alive, Miss Corbyn, because you know we have agreed

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that as this took place some eighteen or nineteen years ago the man may not be alive now, and it is as well not to start by being too sanguine, as otherwise we might have a severe disappointment."

"I am almost convinced that he is alive," Miss Peyton said; "I don't think you would ever have heard of him in this strange way if he hadn't been alive. And now let us change the subject and have supper. I am afraid that we shall find Mr. Allan's dishes none the better for standing so long."

The meal was a very cheerful one. Robert Harbut and Hilda were in high spirits. Miss Peyton, although she had forbidden any allusion to the subject, was evidently full of it. Constance, though the happiest of the party, was the most silent. She had lately herself begun to give up hope. She was ready, had there been anything to search for, to have devoted her life to the pursuit, but when there was no clue to follow up, no clue however faint as to the direction in which the search should lie, nothing apparently to do until chance threw something in her way, she had felt absolutely powerless. Now, the very vague hope with which they had come down to Bath had been unexpectedly realized, and there was again something to work for, and a clue to be followed up. It might end in nothing, but at least it led somewhere for the present. It was like a track to a traveler lost on a moor. It might run in any direction. It might end abruptly at a deserted sheepfold, it might lead to shelter and rescue, at any rate it was something to follow and gave ground for renewed hope and confidence.

"Now, my dears, we can renew the subject," Miss Peyton said at last. "I think to begin with we ought to move a vote of thanks to Robert for having thus succeeded in discovering such an important point."

"But it was accident, pure accident, aunt," Hilda said; "we must not puff him up by premature praise, it will be quite time to do that when he has made something out of the discovery."

"I don't think that is fair," Constance said, "Mr. Harbut has exactly carried out Miss Peyton's instructions, he was to introduce the subject as often as he could in order that from some chance word he might obtain a clue. This he has effected beyond our hopes, and I entirely agree with Miss Peyton."

"Then as we are two to one," that lady said, "we may consider my motion as carried."

"So far," Robert Harbut said, "it has been a matter of pure chance, but you must remember that even the most practised detective cannot invent a clue, he must wait until one presents itself, and then it is his business to carry it out. In this case the first operations are simple and obvious. I shall to-morrow morning take the train to Didcot and then up to Oxford. I shall find out the name of the man who attended Mr. and Mrs. Corbyn on their travels, and, if possible, discover whether his family live at or near Oxford, and if so shall then learn from them if the man is alive, and if so where he is living. If he is dead and has left a widow, it may be useful to find her; he would probably have told her the story, and from her we may learn something which will help us materially. For example, if he had told her that he was present at the ceremony at the church at Folkestone, that would strengthen our case greatly, for the really weak point is that we are not in a position to prove this marriage took place there, and that the missing leaf in the register contained this marriage. I do not say that a court would accept the evidence, but it would strengthen our moral position prodigiously and might perhaps enable us to make a satisfactory compromise."

"I should be ready to make any sort of compromise," Constance said, "as far as the estates are concerned, providing they will admit that my mother was lawfully married."

"I should think," Miss Peyton said, "that even on the evidence that you have now, they might admit that if it would cost them nothing, though I am certain that woman Clitheroe would not give way a single point unless she were forced to."

"You see, Miss Peyton, as I have already explained to Miss Corbyn, the difficulty in effecting anything in the form of a compromise is almost if not quite insuperable. Neither of the principals can do more than bind themselves, the estate is entailed on the direct heir—male or female—and an entail can only be broken by the existing holder with the consent of his next heir. Either Mr. Clitheroe or Miss Corbyn is the owner of the estates, and neither of them can break the entail until they have a son

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of twenty-one years old, or, failing sons, a daughter of that age, or failing children altogether, the consent of the next heir whoever he may be."

"But you yourself said that there might be some sort of a compromise, Robert," Miss Peyton said sharply.

"Yes, there might be a compromise, but one not of a legal nature. Thus Mr. Clitheroe might agree to treat Miss Corbyn as his cousin, and to acknowledge the relationship, and even to put on paper the acknowledgment of his absolute conviction that a marriage took place between her parents. I grant that this would place him in a singular position, and that if Miss Corbyn intended to settle down here in Bath, it would be an almost impossible position, for naturally every one would ask how, if she were Mr. Corbyn's daughter, she did not succeed to the estate. But I take it that she has no intention of residing here, and might even be not disinclined to give an undertaking that she would abstain altogether from visiting this part of England.

"Such an understanding as this would give her the moral satisfaction that she desires. In other respects matters would remain as they are. She might acquiesce in the surrender of her own rights, but she could not bind her heir, who, either he or herself, or by their trustees, or, if a female, by her husband, could take up the case at the point at which you lay it down. In the same way Philip Clitheroe's heirs might repudiate this acknowledgment made by him, which would, in fact, have no legal value, and would be merely an expression of his opinion. Still, that is the line upon which, if at all, it seems to me that a compromise might be effected in the event, of course, of our failing to find the legal evidence of which we are in search."

Miss Peyton was silent. These difficulties had not suggested themselves to her.

"Well, we need not discuss it now," she said abruptly at last. "The great point is to find the evidence; if we cannot do that we will talk over this rigmarole entail business."

Robert Harbut left the next morning by an early train. Late in the afternoon Miss Peyton received a telegram from him—"Successful to a certain extent; don't expect me till to-morrow; I am making inquiries."

It was not until three o'clock on the following afternoon that Robert Harbut returned. The ladies had not stirred out, but had sat pretending to work or to read, but their talk turned upon nothing else than Robert's expedition. "He might just as well have written," Miss Peyton said over and over again, "and told us what he had done. Men are the most provoking creatures about letters."

"Most likely he was a great deal too busy, Miss Peyton," Constance suggested, while Hilda pointed out "that in all probability if he has written, the letter will have gone up to London first, and we should not get it until between twelve and one o'clock."

"It might, or it might not, my dear. Probably it would be put in the West County bags and we should have got it this morning."

"I should think, Miss Peyton, that he did not write because he has not completed his business. He may have had to go some distance to find this man or his family, and he would naturally rather tell us the whole story at once. At any rate I am quite sure that he has been hard at work."

Upon arriving at Oxford Robert Harbut had driven straight to St. Boniface. He found that the bursar was in the college, and was conducted by the junior porter to his rooms. On entering he handed his card to Mr. Freeman, the bursar.

"I am a member of the Inner Temple, Mr. Freeman, and have called to inquire if you will be kind enough to tell me the name of the scout who attended upon Mr. Corbyn and Mr. Rothsay; who had, I believe, rooms on the same staircase about twenty-two years ago. He should be able to give some very important evidence on a case in which I am engaged. I do not know whether the information would be in the college books, but, if so, I shall be extremely obliged if you would give it to me. Of course if you cannot do so, I must endeavor to obtain it from some of the servants who were at the college at the time. If not here now, doubtless some of them are alive and may not improbably be residing in Oxford."

"I should think I could give you the information you require," the bursar said, "it will be very easy to find the staircase, as there is of course a yearly record of the occupation of rooms. The calendar will give us the precise

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year when each gentleman took his degree. I suppose it was in their last year of residence?"

"I should fancy so," Robert said. "The fact of both of them being on one staircase will probably decide that. Each of them may have moved once, perhaps twice, but it is not likely that they were both twice on the same staircase."

After consulting the calendar the bursar took down a volume from his shelves. After examining it for a minute or two he said, "Yes, for the last three terms of their residence they were both on staircase three, third court. Mr. Corbyn's rooms were immediately over those of Mr. Rothsay."

"Yes, that it so, that settles the question then about the year. Now then as to the scout."

Mr. Freeman took down another volume labelled "details of scouts' work." "Yes, here it is. In that year, Thomas Morson was the scout who attended upon the six sets of rooms on that staircase."

"He left the college two or three years later, I think."

"Did he, we shall soon see that. He was here at the beginning of the next year and of the year after that, for he was in charge of the same sets of rooms. Yes, you are right," he went on turning over another page, "his name is not in the next year's list. I can find out exactly when he left if it is of any importance to you by turning to the wages' books."

"Thank you, I do not see at present that it is of any consequence, but there is never any saying what may be useful and what may not."

"He left at the beginning of the long vacation," Mr. Freeman said after some further search.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Freeman, for the trouble you have taken. The further particulars I wish to find out I shall no doubt be able to learn from servants who were here with the man."

"You will find several here who were in the college employment at that time. The college porter has been here over thirty years, and he will be able to give you a list of the other servants who were here with this man, Morson."

Robert Harbut then went back to the porter's lodge.

"I want to have half-an-hour's chat with you," he said.

"I want some information that Mr. Freeman says you can

probably furnish me with, and of course I am ready to pay you for the trouble of giving it," and he slipped a sovereign into the man's hand.

"All right, sir, I will answer any question I can if it is in my way and ain't going to do harm to any members of the college. If it is I say frankly that you won't get anything out of me."

"No; my inquiries concern a man who was a scout here once, who left some twenty years ago."

"You don't mean Thomas Morson?" the porter asked.

"Yes, I do; but how in the world did you guess that?"

"Well, sir, there was another party asking questions about Tom some three months back."

"You don't say so."

"Yes, he came in here one morning; he was rather a seedy-looking chap, with a shiny hat. I was standing at the gateway and he said, 'Porter, I want to have a few words with you about a man named Morson who was a college servant hereabouts twenty years ago.' 'Well,' I said, 'if you want to know about him you had better go and see his people and ask them—they live at Woodstock, and can tell you as much as they like. I don't know what you want to know for, and I don't care, so there is the long and the short of it.' He seemed a good deal a-taken back. However, he put on a bold air and said, 'It might have been something in your pocket if you had told me what I wanted to know. You people down here are too well paid, that is what you are.' 'Well,' said I, 'well paid or not, if you do not step outside them gates sharp I will chuck you out,' and so off he went cussing."

"That is very curious, porter, the fellow hadn't been here before, I suppose?"

"I do not think so. The under porter was here at the time, and I asked him and he said he had never set eyes on him before, and as one of us is always at the gate we should have seen him if he had been here. He looked just the sort of chap as would come to serve a writ, and you may be sure we shouldn't have let him inside the college till we knew what he was up to. Oh, and he said something about his belonging to a detective office, and gave me a card. I've got it somewhere and can show it you if you are interested in it. But here is the under porter. Jim, just

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mind the gate for half an hour. Now, sir, we can sit down comfortable."

He led Robert into the lodge. "Now, sir, what do you want to know about Tom Morson?"

"Well, I want to find him."

"Well, sir, what do you want to find him for, if I may be free to ask? It is many years since I saw Tom; but we were pretty thick together when he was here, and I do not want to do him a bad turn."

"I have nothing against him whatever," Robert said. "We believe that he can give some information that no one else can give about an event that took place nineteen years ago, and as it is important we should be ready to pay a good sum for the information. So you see it will be doing a good turn rather than a bad one to Morson."

"Oh, if that's it, I will tell you all I know, sir; but that is little enough. I can tell you all about him in the days when he was here, but for the last seventeen or eighteen years I have heard nothing of him. His people live, as I told you, at Woodstock. He was a sharp boy and fond of horses, and he has an uncle who was head of the stable to a nobleman in France, and when Tom was fifteen years old he went out to be with him. He was out there about five years, and I don't think it did him much good, except he got to talk French. Then he got later on as a sort of assistant courier to some rich Englishman who was a friend of his uncle's employer, and traveled all over Europe for a couple of years. He had two or three other journeys of the same kind. Then he came back to Woodstock, and said he wanted to settle at home. As he had good testimonials from his employers and was a handy chap, the head porter, who was a cousin of his mother's, was able to get him a berth here as scout. He was a college servant about four years, and a smart fellow he was. He was a favorite with the undergraduates. He was up to all sorts of things, you see, and having been accustomed to valet's work did more for them than most of us did. He used to do very well, for he often went away in the long vacation as a courier. He was a sharp fellow, Tom was. I used to think sometimes a little too sharp. Not anything that wasn't honest, you know, sir, but I don't think his ideas were like those of the rest of us. I know his cousin would never trust him here at the gate after it

was closed. He did at first, but it got said that there was a golden key to the gate of St. Boniface, and that there was many a one passed in here whose name never appeared in the list. I think it got to the head porter's ears, and Tom Morson was never put on to the job after that."

"Do you happen to remember whether, among the gentlemen Morson went on tour with, he went with Mr. Corbyn?"

"Yes, he did," the porter said, without hesitation, "I remember Mr. Corbyn well, but why I remember particularly about Morson going with him was because when he left he told me he was going away with Mr. Corbyn for a long trip this time; he had been with him before when he was an undergraduate. This was two or three years after that. He said that Mr. Corbyn had written to him saying that he was going to travel for a year or so, and if he would like to go with him he would be glad to have him."

"It was curious Morson's throwing up his berth here for a year's engagement," Robert said.

"Well, sir, he was always an unsettled sort of a chap, and was saying that the life did not suit him, and that he should not stop out the year. He got married here two years before he left, and I daresay that would have settled him, but his wife died a year afterwards. That made him worse than before, and he took to drinking a bit, and fell in with rather a bad lot, and he got into two or three scrapes, and I fancy he saw that it could not last much longer, so he jumped at Mr. Corbyn's offer. I never saw him after that, but I know about a couple of years later that he did come back and saw his people at Woodstock. I heard that he went away out to Australia; anyhow, I have never seen him since. I expect he has got on well wherever he is, if he shook off that trick of drinking he was falling into. There was no doubt he was a shrewd fellow and a deep one. I always liked him and found him straight enough, but he wasn't altogether liked among the college servants. I do not know exactly why, except that he wasn't, so to speak, of their sort."

"What are his people at Woodstock?"

"Well, there are not many of them left now, sir; there is a brother there, a butcher, that is the only one of the name as far as I know, but I know he had a sister married and settled at Banbury. I know that because she married

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a cousin of hers, a son of the head porter at that time. He was in the college kitchen, but after he married her they went away to Banbury, where he set up a cook shop, that was a year or two after Tom came here. She was older than he was."

"What was her cousin's name?"

"Whitcombe. I don't know whether she is alive or dead now; but she was alive ten years ago, I know, for one of the servants who had been with him in the kitchen told me he had seen Fred Whitcombe, and that he was doing well, and he had been to dine with him, and he had got five or six children. I don't know that he said she was alive, but if she hadn't been he would have mentioned it."

"Well, I am much obliged to you for your information, and I have no doubt Morson's brother will be able to tell me where he is, if he is alive. It is curious a man like that going to Australia. One would have thought he could have done better at home as a courier."

"Well, one would have thought so, sir. I heard him say, over and over again, that it was a good life, and a jolly one, and that you could line your pockets well, especially when you were traveling with a fool; the drawback was the uncertainty—you might be employed for three months, and then have to wait six before you got another job. But I know he had saved a good bit of money, and that he had a sort of hankering to go out to one of the Colonies. I have heard him say that a man who knew about horses—and he did know about them, and used to make a book on the races, and all that—ought to make a small fortune out there, where he would get land for next to nothing; and with two or three good sires, such as can always be picked up here pretty cheap, you ought to be able to coin money. I know he had laid by a goodish lot of money, and I expect he went in for horse-breeding out there."

A few minutes later Robert Harbut was bowling over in a dogcart to Woodstock. He declined to take the reins, as he wanted to think over what he had heard, and was driven by one of the stablemen, who soon found that his companion had no desire to talk, and therefore, after a few attempts, subsided into silence.

Robert felt that the information he had gained was to a certain extent satisfactory. There was no reason for sup-

posing that the man was dead. Had he been so, the probability was that the porter would have heard of it.

Upon the other hand it was a nuisance that he was so far away; he would be not unlikely to prove troublesome, and the porter had said that he was a deep fellow, and had hinted that he was unscrupulous. He knew, of course, that Algernon Corbyn was keeping this marriage a secret, and it was by no means improbable that he had kept himself acquainted with what was going on in England. If he had learned that Mrs. Corbyn was dead (and as he did not leave England until two years later no doubt he had learnt that), and that the child was being brought up at St. Malo, he would see that he had in his possession a secret that was worth money, and one which he could sell either to the girl herself, or could use to extract money either from Algernon Corbyn or from his successors to the property.

Lastly, and this worried Robert more than the other point, whose were the inquiries which had been made by the porter for Thomas Morson, a short time after Mr. Corbyn's death. Of course, it might be on some matter entirely unconnected with the present one, but it was certainly singular. Who else could be interested in this business? If any one else were interested he evidently knew more than he himself did, for he was acquainted beforehand with Morson's name. Well, he should be able to judge to some extent by the manner of Morson's brother whether he had been questioned on the subject before. If he refused to give him his brother's address in Australia it would be a proof either that Thomas Morson had some special reasons for charging him to keep his address secret, or that such reasons had been supplied by the man who had first visited him.

So deeply was Robert Harbut thinking over the matter that he was surprised when the trap drew up suddenly before a butcher's shop in Woodstock.

He at once climbed down and went in. The butcher came out from the parlor behind, and as he entered, Robert looked keenly at him. He answered pretty closely to the porter's description of his brother. He was a spare man with a shrewd and rather shifty face.

"I want five minutes chat with you, Mr. Morson, if you can spare me the time," he began. "A matter upon which

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I am here is connected with your brother, and might be of considerable advantage to him."

Robert, who was watching the man, saw an instantaneous change in his face when he mentioned his brother's name. The eyes closed a little and the lips were pressed tightly together.

"Step inside, sir," he said, and he led the way to the back room.

"That is not surprise," Robert said to himself, "he has been warned that inquiries may be made, and perhaps bribed to hold his tongue. At any rate he is going to hold it."

"My brother, sir?" the butcher went on as he closed the door. "I don't know that there is much I can tell you about him. He went away from England a great many years ago."

"Yes, so I have heard," Robert said, "he went to Australia."

The man was silent for a moment as if reflecting whether he would in any way commit himself by admitting this, but concluded that it would be better not to deny it.

"Yes," he said slowly, "he went to Australia, and there, for aught I know, he has been ever since."

"Cannot you give me his address?"

"No, sir," the man said decidedly, "he moved about, and where he is or what has become of him I cannot say."

"Is it long since you heard of him?"

"A long time since, and now I can't say where he is, I am sure."

"Perhaps you could find out," Robert said, quietly. "I should not mind paying twenty pounds for the information."

"No, sir. I don't know that I could find out no how," the butcher said, doggedly.

"That is unfortunate, because it might be worth a good many hundred pounds to him."

The man was silent.

"Perhaps, now," Robert went on, "you may hear from him ere long. Here is my card and address; you might let me know if you should hear. It will be worth, as I said, twenty pounds to you. Perhaps you have one of his old letters by you. The postmark might be of assistance."

"I never keep letters when I have once read them. As

I have told you, I haven't heard from him I don't know how many years, and ain't likely to hear again ; but should I hear from him, which may be three or four months, or may be in three or four years, I will let you know. There is no reason why my brother Thomas should want to hide himself, as I know on."

"None at all, so far as I know," Robert Harbut said ; "and in the present case it would be a handsome sum in his pocket if he could be found. Well, good-morning. I am sorry you cannot give me the information I want."

He went out to the trap.

"Take the horse to the inn and give him a feed," he said to the man. "I shall get something to eat here, and the horse will go all the better on his way back after half-an-hour's rest. Which is the principal inn?"

"That on the right, sir, three hundred yards down."

"All right. I will walk there."

The butcher had come to the door to see him off, and Robert was inwardly conscious that he was standing there watching him as he strolled down the street, until he entered the hotel. It was now three o'clock.

"I want something to eat," he said. "Anything will do—a steak, if you have one in the house. If not, some cold meat."

"We haven't got a steak, sir, but we can send out and get one. There was a joint at one o'clock, but I shouldn't say it was cold yet."

"Well, get me a steak then, five minutes won't make any difference."

Robert eat his meal with deliberation, then strolled out into the yard and told the driver that he should be ready in a quarter of an hour.

"By the way, can you tell me where the Post Office is?"

"Yes, sir, it is the first street turning off to the right in the main road, but your shortest way will be to go out by the back gate there and up the lane, that will take you into the street just opposite the Post Office."

This was very satisfactory information, as he should be able to get there without being observed by the butcher, who would probably still be on the watch.

The Post Office was a stationer's shop. Robert went in, having glanced at the name over the door before doing so.

"Mrs. James," he said, "can I have a word with you in private?"

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The woman, who had a hurried nervous look, opened the door and called "Eliza," and a girl arriving told her to look after the shop for a minute, and then led the way into the back room.

"Mrs. James, I am a barrister, and I belong to the Middle Temple." The statement was made with an air of such gravity that the woman was greatly impressed. "I have come down here to make a few inquiries," he said. "I don't wish you to tell me anything about Post Office business, which is contrary to rule, but you can answer my question without in any way breaking the regulations, and I am empowered to pay you five pounds for so doing." And he produced a bank-note.

He saw the woman's eyes glisten. Her rent was in arrear and the five pounds would be a godsend indeed, but she did not touch the bank-note.

"I must know what the question is, sir."

"It is a very simple one, Mrs. James. Do you often have letters here with an Australian postmark?"

"Yes, sir, pretty often. There are several parties about here who have friends out there."

"Morson the butcher, for example," Robert said, "he has a brother out there; does he often hear from him?"

"I don't know, sir, but he does get letters pretty regular with the Australian postmark. He had one only two days ago."

"Thank you, that is all I wanted to know, though perhaps you might tell me whether he often posts letters in return."

"No, sir, I know his handwriting well enough, but don't know as I ever saw a letter from him to Australia. You see he goes into Oxford two or three times a week, and may post his letters there."

"Thank you, that is all. Here is the note. I don't think even the Postmaster-General could object to you answering those questions. However, there is no occasion for you to mention that you have been asked them. It is rather an important matter, and we do not wish it to be known that we are making inquiries about it. Will you let me have half a quire of paper and a few envelopes so that if by any chance you should be asked if I have been here, you can say that I called in and bought some paper and envelopes."

Much relieved to find that her visitor had not asked her to give him the address of a letter, or to break any other regulation, the woman at once supplied him with the paper and envelopes. With these he went down the lane again to the hotel, returned to the coffee-room, and asked for pen and ink, and wrote three or four letters. Then he went out to the trap which was waiting at the door, and drove back to Oxford, and thence went on by the first train to Banbury.

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CHAPTER XI.

It was seven o'clock when Robert Harbut arrived at Banbury, and after ordering a bed at the principal hotel, he made inquiries for the Whitcombes, and had no difficulty in obtaining their address. It was a confectioner's, with a large lunch-room in the rear. Mrs. Whitcombe was behind the counter. She was a pleasant, motherly-looking woman, without the slightest resemblance to her brother, the butcher.

"Mrs. Whitcombe," he said, "I have looked in on private business. I am anxious to communicate with your brother in Australia. I learned at St. Boniface that you were his sister, and came on to ask you to give me his address. I am a barrister, and my clients want some information he may be able to give them, and that they are ready to pay for handsomely."

"I have not heard of Tom for years, sir," Mrs. Whitcombe said. "He mostly writes to my brother John, at Woodstock, but John and my husband are not very good friends, so I have not heard of Tom for a long time. I write to him once a year, but it is a long time since he answered me. He may have moved, he was always a restless chap, Tom, but his last address was Ash Farm, Brisbane, Queensland. I expect if he has moved they will send a letter on to him from there. He has got some stables in the town, but I don't know what the address was. I have not seen Tom since he was at St. Boniface. His wife—she's dead, poor thing—was a sort of cousin of ours. I was staying with Tom and her just after their marriage, when I first met my husband, who was at St. Boniface, too. Tom was not the same after her death. My husband spoke to him about it, and so did I, and he took it the wrong way, and there was a quarrel, and that was one reason that helped to decide my husband to give up St. Boniface and start in business for himself. Then Tom went away too, and I never saw him afterwards. Still

the ill-feeling had passed off, and he wrote to me and I wrote to him. I suppose there is nothing else I can tell you, sir."

"No, thank you, Mrs. Whitcombe, I am much obliged to you for your information ;" and Mrs. Whitcombe hurried off to serve some customers who had just come into the shop, and Robert Harbut returned to the hotel highly satisfied with the result of his inquiries.

"It was a piece of luck, indeed," he said to himself, "that the porter at St. Boniface happened to remember about this sister. As she was married and away from Woodstock and Oxford, her brother did not think it necessary to warn her not to mention his address. Not, by the way, that I think that it is his doing. I fancy it is the butcher's. I imagine that he has been bribed by that detective to keep it a secret from anyone else who might come, or he may have gathered from the inquiries the fellow made that it would be better to keep it secret until he heard from his brother as to what he wanted done in the matter. He let out that he intended to write to him when he said he might get a letter in three or four months or so, which would be about the time it would take for a letter to get there, and another to come back. Letters are irregular in getting there, and I suppose one could not rely upon an answer in less time than that. I should like to have indulged in the luxury of going back to the fellow's shop, and telling him that he had a letter from his brother only the day before, but it would not have done. It is possible that I may have to negotiate with Thomas Morson through him, and it would be a bad beginning to have a row which might end in my having to give him a thrashing. Well, I am fairly tired, for I have been going ever since seven this morning ; now I must see what is the first train that goes at a decent hour to Didcot, and catches a down train there. Now I will smoke a pipe and turn in. I would give fifty pounds out of my own pocket to know who that fellow was who has been beforehand with me."

This was the story that Robert Harbut related to Miss Peyton and the two girls on his return to Bath the next day.

"Well, I think you have done exceedingly well, Robert," Miss Peyton said, when he brought it to an end. "I was inclined to be cross because you did not write to us yes-

terday, but I see that your time was fully occupied. I think, upon the whole, your news is as good as we can expect ; what do you say, my dear ? ”

“ Oh, very much better, Miss Peyton ; wonderfully better, I think. I thought Mr. Harbut might have had great difficulty in finding anything about this man, and then I had quite made up my mind that if he did learn anything about him he would find that he was dead. Now we know that he is alive, and where he is. I don’t know how to thank you enough, Mr. Harbut. ”

“ I am very pleased with you, Robert, ” Miss Leicester said decisively, “ and consider that you have fully justified my good opinion of you. I shall probably say more to you on the subject upon another occasion. ”

“ Are we in the way, Hilda ? ” Miss Peyton asked.

“ No, auntie, the matter can stand over. ”

Robert Harbut laughed ; he was in high spirits at his success. “ Ah, ” he said, “ if I had but run against Major Rothsay last time I was here, what a thing it would have been ; we have lost three months. ”

“ Yes, Robert, ” Miss Peyton said, “ but if you had met him and heard this story everything would be changed. Neither Hilda nor I might have come to know Miss Corbyn. I do not see that the delay is of any consequence. ”

“ It would be no consequence at all, Miss Peyton, if it were not for the seedy-looking man in the shiny hat. Whoever is employing him he has got a long start of us. There has been time for a letter from him to go out to Australia and for an answer to come back. ”

“ Yes, Mr. Harbut, ” Constance agreed ; “ but you see we do not know whether the butcher at Woodstock was any more communicative to him than he was to you. He may have had instructions from his brother not to give his address, and may have refused to do so until he wrote out to Queensland and obtained his reply. ”

“ That is so, Miss Corbyn. It may be that the reply came in that very letter that he received two days ago, and that he has already communicated the address to the man with the shiny hat. ”

“ Why do you suppose he could want to keep his address secret ? ” Constance asked.

“ I think that he is playing a deep game, Miss Corbyn. My theory is this—I think that he entered Mr. Corbyn’s

service with the fixed idea of making a good thing out of it. Your father probably told him that he was going to make a secret marriage, and wanted him to travel on the continent with him for some months. He saw at once that if this marriage was to be kept secret his knowledge of it would give him a great hold upon Mr. Corbyn, and I have no doubt that before he left him, having learned that he intended to keep the marriage secret until his father's death, he extorted from him a considerable sum of money as the price of his silence, agreeing to emigrate if he received his price. Of course, I do not know what allowance Mr. Corbyn had from his father, but as heir to an entailed property he would have had no difficulty in raising five hundred or a thousand pounds to close the mouth of this rascally servant of his. As the fellow is evidently clever, as well as uncrupulous, it is probable he has kept himself well informed as to what has occurred since his absence. Had your mother lived, he would probably have extracted further sums from time to time from Mr. Corbyn; indeed he may have done so for anything we know. When he hears of Mr. Corbyn's death, and that the marriage has been kept secret, it is by no means unlikely that the fellow may come back again, and may attempt to bargain either with Mr. Clitheroe for his silence, or with you for information which will place you in a position to prove yourself the legitimate heir to the estate."

"Then you think I shall hear from him?"

"I think you will either hear from him or see him. If, when he arrives in England, he makes inquiries about Mr. Clitheroe, he will very soon learn that he is not the kind of man who would purchase his silence; but I should think that in any case he would come to you first. He may be on his way home now, but of course that will depend much upon the state of his affairs out there. He might consider that there was no need for haste, and that a year hence would do as well as now. He might wind up his business in Australia before leaving, or might put it in someone else's hands and leave at once. There is no saying, in fact, what he is most likely to do, and it is certainly probable that he would think that he would get a higher sum by delaying for a few months before coming to you. The question of time seems therefore altogether uncertain, but assuming, as I do, that the fellow is a scamp, that he has

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extorted money from Mr. Corbyn, and that he intends to gain further advantage from his knowledge that your father and mother were married, you are sure to hear from him sooner or later.

"It may be, as I have said, in five or six weeks, it may not be for a year. I admit that it is just possible he is contented with the sum he extorted at the time, and that as he supposed Mr. Corbyn would himself acknowledge the marriage when his father died, he may have taken no further trouble in the matter; and may to the end of his life remain in ignorance of your father's death, and may think of you as installed as heiress of Corbyn Court. I regard this as unlikely in the extreme, but it is just possible. These are all things that we shall have to think out. At any rate, if we do not hear from him in time, we shall have to take steps to send out to discover his whereabouts in Australia, and then to enter into communication with him. Upon the whole, Miss Corbyn, we have reason to congratulate ourselves that we have again obtained a clue, and that whereas when we returned from Folkestone, it seemed as if it would be well-nigh impossible to prove this marriage, we have now reason to believe that there is a witness of it alive, and ready for a consideration to testify to the facts."

"Oh, yes, it is much more hopeful," Constance agreed. "Of course I shall be ready to pay anything."

"Now," Miss Peyton said, "do you, Robert, take my niece out for a drive, I shall take a little turn with Miss Corbyn. We have not been out to-day, and a little fresh air will clear my brains, then I shall read and she can think quietly over what you have been telling us, and after dinner the subject can be renewed; there is nothing worse than harping over the same thing, it is far better to dismiss it altogether from one's mind, and to take it up fresh again, at least I have always found it so."

"It seems to me all plain and straightforward, Mr. Harbut," Constance said when the conclave opened again, "if it were not for what you call the man in the shiny hat."

"That is the intrusive figure, Miss Corbyn: the spectre at the wedding. Who is he? Who is employing him? What is his object? These are the questions I have been asking myself ever since I heard of his existence."

"If it were not for what you have told me about Mr. Clitheroe, I should have supposed that he must be em-

ployed by him, no one else would seem to have any interest in the matter."

"That is the puzzle, Miss Corbyn. Ferris told me so distinctly, that Clitheroe was only anxious to see the right thing done, and that he would certainly offer no factious opposition if your case were made out, that I cannot imagine he can be the mover in this matter. If he is, it is certain that it has not been done through Ferris, because putting aside the fact that the firm is one of the most straightforward and honorable ones going, they consider themselves in this affair as trustees of your father's estate, rather than as Philip Clitheroe's solicitors. That being so I am altogether puzzled."

"It is evidently some one who knows a good deal more about the business than we do. We have had to trust to chance to find the name of the man who accompanied Mr. Corbyn and his wife on the Continent, while they were able to send down to Oxford to make their inquiries within a very short time of Mr. Corbyn's death. Of course it is quite possible that the man in the shiny hat is employed by some old acquaintance of Morson's, a man who had heard from him about this tour, and about the marriage being a private one, and how a child had been born at St. Malo. This man may have seen the announcement of Mr. Corbyn's death in the newspaper, and may have remembered the story, and the thought may have occurred to him that there was money to be made out of it. He may have gone down to Bath, or written to someone there and found that nothing was known there of a wife or child, and may have then said, 'if I can find out where Tom Morson is, we can work the oracle together.'"

"What do you mean by work the oracle, Mr. Harbut?"

"Well, Miss Corbyn, it is an expression meaning to manage the business."

"You are quite right in asking, my dear," Miss Peyton said. "Men interlard their conversation with slang in these days in a dreadful way, and instead of girls being shocked by the introduction of these phrases, they catch them up and use them themselves."

"I had no idea of correcting Mr. Harbut," Constance said in some distress, "I asked because I thought that it was a legal term that he was using."

Robert and Miss Leicester both laughed.

"You will need another year or two in England to complete your education, Constance," the latter said.

"Come, come," Miss Peyton put in, tapping the table with her knuckles, "this is trifling; let us keep to our subject now or postpone it until to-morrow. Now, Robert, what were you saying?"

Robert looked preternaturally grave.

"I think my last words were, Miss Peyton, they might work the oracle together, the words being used with reference to the employer of the man with the shiny hat and Thomas Morson. If this were the case, he would only have gone to get the said Thomas' address. The butcher, who is distinctly a shrewd fellow, though unquestionably a sad liar, would no doubt have already sent his brother the news of Mr. Corbyn's death, assuming, of course, that he had acted as his brother's agent in the matter, and was in communication with someone here who kept him informed of what was going on. He would in that case probably have fought shy of the man and his shiny hat, and put him off as he did me, until he had written to his brother and received an answer as to whether to give his address or not. I am inclined to think that this was the course that he would adopt in any case."

"In that case, Mr. Harbut, no one could have got any very great start of us. Of course, if this man was, as you are supposing, acting for himself, there is no occasion to be afraid of him, because he would only be wanting Morson to do what we suspect Morson is trying to do on his own account, namely, to obtain money from me or from Mr. Clitheroe by saying that I am the heiress, that a marriage had taken place, and that he knew where it was performed, and where the proof could be found. If that supposition is correct we need not trouble ourselves any more about this man. Again, if he is acting for people interested in keeping me from proving my rights, I don't think it is likely they would communicate with Morson at once."

"Why do you think so, Miss Corbyn?" Robert asked eagerly.

"Well, it seems to me that their interest is to keep quiet as long as they have no reason to suppose that we are on the right track. If one of them has cut out the leaf of the register, and has learnt from it that Morson was a witness, I should think the last thing in the world they would do

would be to write to him. They would have no reason for supposing that he had taken any further interest in the matter, would imagine that it was extremely improbable that he would ever hear of Mr. Corbyn's death, or ever give the business further thought. On the other hand, if they were to write to him, they would excite his curiosity, would show that for some reason or other his evidence was very important, and would, in fact, put themselves in his power."

"You are right, Miss Corbyn," Robert Harbut said in a tone of much admiration. "You have the best head of us all. Certainly that is the view they would take. They would want to find out whether they had anything to fear from this witness, whether he was alive, whether he was in England, and whether there was any chance whatever of his moving in the matter. But when once they heard that he was in Australia, and completely out of their way, they would take no further interest in him, unless, as you say, they saw that we were moving in it, and were also on the search for him, then they might take steps to be beforehand with us and to get him out of our way. Yes, that alters the case altogether, and I have no longer any fear that we have been forestalled."

"That is comfortable," Miss Peyton said, "and I don't think that we can leave off at a better point. By to-morrow, perhaps, you may be able to give us an opinion, Robert, as to what had better be done next, or if you cannot," she added, a little maliciously, "perhaps Miss Corbyn can. You just said she had the best head among us."

"Oh, Miss Peyton," Constance said, in a pained voice, "Mr. Harbut didn't mean that; only you see it is natural, when I am always thinking of a thing over and over again in every light, that I should sometimes hit upon an idea. Mr. Harbut has done so much and thought of everything so well, that I am sure——" and she stopped, and her lips quivered.

"You are a goose, my dear," Miss Peyton said. "I quite agree with you—although it is painful to say so before my niece, who has already far too high an opinion of him—that he has acted very shrewdly and cleverly in the business. I snub him a little because it is good for him to be snubbed. Young men always want snubbing, but he knows that he is

rather a favorite of mine, upon the whole, and that I have rather abetted Hilda in her infatuation. You need not mind about him, my dear, he can fight his own battles and he has Hilda to help him. Now I propose that we send for the carriage, there is a concert at the Assembly Room, and it will do us all good to get this out of our minds for a little time ; we shall become monomaniacs if we let our thoughts run only upon one subject."

"Any fresh ideas, Robert?" Miss Peyton asked after breakfast next morning.

"Nothing very fresh, Miss Peyton. There is only one thing to be done it seems to me, and that is to find out the name of some sharp firm of solicitors at Brisbane, or if we cannot hear of one there, of one at Sydney, and tell them to find out all about this Thomas Morson, what he is doing, how he is situated, what sort of a character he bears, and then, if they think it safe, to tell him that his presence is required in England to give evidence as to the marriage of Mr. Corbyn, that his expenses will, of course, be paid, and a sum of, say, five hundred pounds be given him for his trouble. Of course, he will have no idea that the register is missing, and will suppose that he is only required as an additional witness, and to prove that the Corbyn of the register is the Corbyn he knew at Oxford. I see no reason why he should not agree to do so ; no doubt he intended to have made, and would have made, a great deal more out of it if, as he hoped, the daughter at St. Malo was altogether in ignorance of her birth or prospects, but when he sees the game in that direction is up, there is no reason why he should not earn his five hundred pounds. Of course, if he is doing well out there he may stand out for say a thousand on the ground that an absence for four or five months would injure his business, but that, of course, can be arranged. What do you think, Miss Corbyn?"

"Yes, that seems quite right, Mr. Harbut, but there is one other thing that I have been thinking of."

"What is that?"

"We agreed last night, you know, that when these people, who have been making inquiries, found that the man was in Australia, they would not be likely to do anything further, believing that we could not know that he was an essential witness."

"Yes, that was what we agreed, Miss Corbyn."

"But don't you think it possible, if not probable, that they would guard themselves by arranging that they should know if we have got upon the right track."

"No doubt they would be glad to do so, but I don't see how they could do that."

"It seems to me, Mr. Harbut, that the man who went down to Woodstock might have said to the Morson there, I will give you a certain sum if you will let me know at once if anyone should come to you to inquire for your brother's address."

"That is quite possible, Miss Corbyn," Robert said gravely. "I did not think of it before, but now you have suggested it I should think it very probable. Certainly it is a thing they would be likely to do. They would be perfectly content to remain quiet and to leave this man in Australia altogether alone, so long as they believed there was no chance whatever of our getting on to his track. By making an arrangement of the kind you mention with the butcher, to whom they may be sure we should go if we want to get at his brother, they would learn at once that we had got hold of the right clue and were following it up, and would themselves act without loss of time."

"How could they act?" Constance asked.

"If perfectly unscrupulous and with plenty of funds at their disposal, their course would probably be to send an agent to him with instruction to say, for purposes of our own we want to get you out of the way. Another party wants you to prove that the Corbyn married in Folkestone Church is Algernon Corbyn, of Bath. They might tell him this or they might not; but at any rate they would tell him that they wanted to get him out of the way, and were prepared to give him a round sum down to sell off his business at once, to change his name, and to sail by the next vessel say to San Francisco, and to allow him so much a year as long as he remained in the United States and held his tongue."

"Then, in that case, Mr. Harbut, there is evidently no time to be lost."

"No; supposing your suggestion to be a correct one, Miss Corbyn, I should say we ought to lose no time whatever, but should send out instructions by the next mail."

"But supposing the other people, whoever they are, sent out an agent direct by the next mail, Mr. Harbut, he would

be before us. Suppose you wrote to a firm in Sydney some days might be lost, or even a week or two, before there was a vessel going up to Brisbane. Perhaps they would not send themselves, but would write to someone there to take it in hand, and he might waste some days before he went out to find this man. You see, if they had even twelve hours start of us, it might be fatal."

Robert Harbut was silent ; he could not deny the justice of the girl's reasoning.

"I have been thinking it over all night," Constance went on ; "and it seems to me absolutely essential that Thomas Morson should hear from us before he hears from anyone else. Twenty hours loss of time might be everything, and if we once lost this man we might never recover his traces again. So I have quite made up my mind, if Miss Peyton will be so very kind as to spare me, to go out myself."

"To go out yourself !" her three hearers exclaimed in astonishment.

"Why not ?" Constance asked, quietly ; "there is nothing very extraordinary for a lady to go out by herself to India or Australia. I see no difficulty in it whatever. I should not like to trust anyone else when I know how important even an hour may be. The moment the ship arrives in port I should land, and could start in half-an-hour for Morson's place, wherever it may be. When I found the man, I should say 'I am Miss Corbyn, the daughter of Mr. Corbyn you traveled with. I want your evidence in England to the effect that the Mr. Corbyn you saw married at Folkestone was Mr. Corbyn who was at St. Boniface, and I have a paper here ready signed agreeing to bear the expenses of your journey and to pay a thousand pounds for your trouble ; but in the meantime I want you to drive with me at once to the nearest magistrate, and there, in his presence, to sign a declaration to that effect.' If I had that once in my pocket, the other man might come when he liked, as I suppose the declaration, properly attested, could be used as evidence."

"No doubt it could," Robert Harbut said ; "although it would be much better to have the man himself in court."

"Of course, I will get him if possible, Mr. Harbut ; but at any rate, after having signed his declaration he would be less likely to listen to any offers made to him by the other side. Besides, if I were there, I should go to a solicitor

and get him to put someone on to watch the man night and day, and to follow him wherever he went, even to the United States, so that we should not lose sight of him again."

"But, surely, if you were to send out an agent, Robert, it would do as well as Miss Corbyn going herself," Miss Peyton said.

"I daresay it would, Miss Peyton," Constance broke in before Robert Harbut could answer; "but I want to do it myself. I should be in such a fever of anxiety for the next four or five months that I don't know how I should get through them; and I should never forgive myself if by any chance it went wrong. And, in the second place, I should like to clear my mother's name myself. Besides, sending out a good detective would cost a great deal of money."

"That need not trouble you, my dear," Miss Peyton said. "I am convinced that you will come into your inheritance, and I shall be only too pleased to let you have any money you require. This you can treat as a loan, and repay me when you come into your fortune."

"You are very, very kind," Constance said with tears in her eyes, "but please do not try to prevent my going. I would much rather go myself."

"But, my dear Constance," Miss Leicester said, "I don't think you realize what an undertaking it would be. Fancy making such a journey by yourself."

"I think I have heard," Constance said, "of girls going out alone to India or China to be married there. I don't think I should like to do that, but if girls can do it to get married, surely I can do it to clear my mother's name."

Miss Peyton smiled in spite of her vexation.

"You may think marriage a more important thing some day than you seem to think at present, my dear. Still, I own I do not see any great difficulty about the voyage: it is what you will do there that I am thinking of."

"I do not see any difficulty at all, Miss Peyton. Brisbane is a large town, and I suppose the country round is just as civilized as it is here; besides, really, I think it very likely that I shall not be alone. If there is time before the mail goes, I shall run over to St. Malo, and I feel very sure that my dear nurse, Madame Duport, will insist on going with me. She would have stopped in England with me for a year or more if I would have let her, and would have

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spent every halfpenny that she has in the world to help me. She regards me as her child, and although she lets me have my own way a great deal, she insists on my letting her have hers too, and as she will be paymaster," she added with a smile, "I suppose she will have her own way in this."

"Well, that will be a comfort," Miss Peyton said, and then after a pause went on, "Robert, there is the *Times* on that table, please see about the sailing of the Australian Mails. Of course, my dear, you will go from Southampton, the journey through Europe to Brindisi would be very trying to a woman or two women by themselves."

"Of course, if you have made up your mind to go, Miss Corbyn, it will be as well to go by an early steamer, that is, by the next that sails. But I hardly think that the question is a vital one. Even supposing that your unknown foes should act exactly as we have supposed possible, and should know that we are inquiring about Morson, they would feel sure that there was no immediate cause for hurry. They would learn that we had not obtained his address at Woodstock, and would suppose that we should have to wait for that until an answer comes from Australia, for it is unlikely in the extreme that they know even of the existence of the married sister, of whom I got the information. So, though I perfectly agree that it would be as well to lose no time, I do not think that the question is altogether urgent. Ah, here are the sailings of the P. and O. The next steamer sails from Southampton for Sydney on Thursday, the 22nd."

"That is ten days from now, and will give me plenty of time," Constance said. "You don't think there is any chance of their sending by Brindisi to catch the last steamer at Alexandria."

"I should say not the slightest, Miss Corbyn. It was only the day before yesterday that I was at Woodstock, and it is most unlikely that the butcher would write that day to the man who had called upon him; the latter would have to communicate to his employers, whoever they are; they would have to think the matter over, find a suitable agent, and so on. I should consider it quite out of the question that they could complete their preparations and send a man off in time to overtake the last steamer at Alexandria. Why, they would not get the letter until to-

morrow morning, and would have but three days at most to decide upon their plans and make their arrangements. No, I do not think you need feel the slightest anxiety on that score. The more I think of it, indeed, the more certain does it seem to me that our idea that the man with the shiny hat is employed by some old friend of Morson's, who wants to let him know that your father is dead, that you have not appeared, and that there is money to be made out of restoring you to your rights, is the correct one. For with the exception of Philip Clitheroe, no one else can have any interest whatever in keeping you out of your inheritance."

"It would certainly seem so," Constance agreed, "if so, all the better; but in any case it seems to me that my plan is the best."

"Before you start, Miss Corbyn, you had better give me a power of attorney to act for you, for I should not be in the least surprised if on your arrival in Australia you find that Morson has left for England."

"I should be glad to do that, Mr. Harbut, but I don't see how he is to know that you are the person he is to come to, unless, indeed, they have watched me ever since I came to England, and do you know, madame and I did think we were watched when we were in Pimlico."

"Did you?" Robert asked, eagerly. "What made you think that?"

"Perhaps it was all fancy," Constance replied, "but there was a man who used to hang about our street, and I used to think that he looked specially at our door whenever he passed it, and once or twice the same man kept behind us all the way to the Temple. Of course, we could not say he was watching us, and it may have been a mere accident, but both madame and I fancied that we were watched. Very likely it was only a silly idea from our being strange in London."

"Of course, it is possible," Robert Harbut replied. "But if you were watched it upsets our last idea that the man in the shiny hat can be employed by a chum of Morson's, and would almost prove that those who are at work against you are people with long purses, and that when Mr. Corbyn died they at once set to work on the one hand to find out this Morson, and on the other to ascertain whether you suspected that you were entitled to his estates, and what steps you were taking in the matter."

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"Well," Miss Peyton said, "it is no use worrying any more over that matter. You may guess as much as you like, but as it is purely guess work, that is a mere loss of time. Let us be practical. Now, I understand that you have made up your mind, Constance, to go by this next steamer, and that you want to get over to St. Malo to see this Frenchwoman of yours as soon as you can. In that case, every hour you stop here is so much lost. How do you go to St. Malo, direct by sea?"

"Yes, Miss Peyton."

"See when the next steamer starts, Robert."

"One sails this evening," Robert replied after consulting the *Times*.

"Then you had better go by that," Miss Peyton said decidedly. "If you have to go, the sooner you go the better, and I would much rather lose you at once if I am to lose you, than be dillydallying over it for two or three days. Don't look tearful, my dear. I knew your story when you came to me, and knew that you might be leaving before long; besides, as I myself brought you here on purpose that you might, if possible, obtain some clue in the matter, I should indeed be silly to grumble because you have succeeded. I brought Robert Harbut down to help us in the search, and more has come of it than I expected. I am heartily glad, my dear, though I own I shall miss you sorely just at first. However, when you come to your own, we shall be great friends I hope, and as you will still be an unprotected female, I shall, if you let me, take you under my wing, and see that no fortune-hunter runs away with you. But now to business, again. Robert, I suppose, you mean to go up with Miss Corbyn, and to take her down to Southampton and see her on to the boat."

"Certainly, Miss Peyton."

"There is not the least occasion, indeed there is not," Constance protested.

"I think it much better, my dear. Going up to London is nothing, and I don't mean to say that you would be likely to come to any harm in crossing town or on going on board at Southampton. Still it is not pleasant for a young lady all alone, and I am sure Robert would be glad to go with you, and that my niece can spare him very well till to-morrow at lunch time."

"Certainly I can, aunt, though it is not every young lady that I should approve of his running about with; but I should not like Constance to go alone."

"That is settled then, and when he gets back we will go down together for a few days to Torquay or Teignmouth, just as you like. How long can you stay away, Robert?"

"I was just going to say, Miss Peyton, that you must please reckon without me. I told Hilda when we came down that four days was as much as I could manage, and it is already five. In any case I should have gone back to-morrow morning at the very latest, so that you see, Miss Corbyn, I am only curtailing my stay here by a few hours."

"I am sorry, Mr. Harbut, for you have done nothing but attend to my affairs since you came down here; still I know that it is not of the least use protesting or talking. It seems to me that you are all very obstinate."

"You are the last person who ought to say so, Constance," Hilda laughed, "for if we are so, we are only following at a very long distance the example you set us. I think, aunt, we may as well stay here for the next few days; it is handy for getting back to town, and I am quite sure you will want to run up to see our travelers off."

Miss Peyton smiled.

"Well, my dear, I think that we shall both want to do that; besides, Constance will have a good many things to get for her voyage, and to see about, and it will be much better in every respect that she and her friend should come to me in Audley Street, instead of going into lodgings for the few days they will be over. So you and I will, as you say, stay here until the end of the week, and then go up to town together, and it is understood, Constance, that you and Madame Duport are to come straight to me when you arrive. What train will you want to go by to-day, Robert? It is no use going earlier than necessary. You will only want time to drive from Paddington across to Waterloo."

"The train leaves Waterloo at seven, Miss Peyton, so the four o'clock from here will take us up in time."

"Very well, then, we will have early dinner at half-past two, and in the meantime we will go for a drive. We will go by your place, Constance. I should like to see this Corbyn Court of yours."

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CHAPTER XII.

AFTER seeing Constance down to the ladies' cabin on board the boat at Southampton, Robert Harbut returned by the nine o'clock train to town. As he went up to town he thought over the incidents that had happened since Constance Corbyn came to England. Everything had gone well until it was found that the leaf had been abstracted from the register. This at the time he had unhesitatingly put down as the work of Algernon Corbyn; but he no longer felt sure of this. Now that he learned that someone else had been at work from the first, that inquiries had been made about Morson within a fortnight of Mr. Corbyn's death, and that as Constance supposed she had been watched while in London, the aspect of the affair had changed, and it was quite probable that the first act of these mysterious opponents had been to obtain possession of the one absolute proof of the marriage. That James Ferris could know anything of the affair he regarded as altogether out of the question.

"I have a great mind to consult him on the subject," he said to himself. "I suppose it would be a most unprofessional proceeding, but then the whole affair is unprofessional as far as I am concerned, and I don't see any thing else to do. Of course I should not take such a step with any one else but Jim; but he is the soul of honor, and would never have put me into this thing unless everything had been perfectly straightforward. I can make neither head nor tail of it, and can see nothing to be done but to ask him if he can throw any light on the matter. I will drop him a line in the morning and ask him to come in and smoke a pipe with me at nine o'clock to-morrow evening, if he has no other engagement; and if he has, to make an appointment to give me an hour at the earliest time he can fix."

The clock was just striking nine on the following evening when there was a knock at the outer door of Robert's

chambers, for he had closed this lest any of his Temple friends might drop in.

"Well, Bob, how are you?" James Ferris asked cheerfully, "and what is the matter with you? and what means this mysterious summons to a midnight conference?"

"I am well enough, Jim, but I am worried, and I will tell you all about it when we have got fairly settled. There's the 'bacco; there is a clean churchwarden if you like it. There is a box of cigars, and good ones, help yourself; also here is port and whiskey."

"Port good?"

"Yes, very fair."

"Then we will begin with that, anyhow, Bob. Now then, our pipes are drawing, our glasses are filled, unbosom yourself. Go ahead."

"I am rather in a queer position, Jim. You see you put me into this affair."

"You forget, my dear friend," Jim said, mildly, "that at present I have not the most remote idea of what affair you mean."

"This Corbyn affair."

"Oh, it is about that," Jim Ferris said, in some surprise. "Has the girl come over? Have you persuaded her to go back again? Have you fallen in love with her?"

"I will tell you all that in due course, Jim, but first of all let us recall our conversation on the subject. I understood from you that Miss Corbyn was likely to come over here to make some inquiries as to a late client of yours. You said that you had not the slightest belief that such a marriage had taken place, and that your object in asking me to interest myself on her behalf was that the girl was a nice girl, that she knew nothing of the world, and would almost for a certainty fall into bad hands, who would encourage her search and fleece her and her friends out of their last penny unless I would act as her mentor."

"All this is true, oh king," James Ferris agreed. "What next?"

"Next, you said that your client in the matter was a very honorable young fellow, who was ready to do the handsome thing in the way of providing for the girl, and who would be the last man in the world to offer any opposition to the exceedingly improbable event of the marriage being proved."

Jim Ferris nodded.

"Those are still your views?"

"Of course, they are," he replied; "we are solicitors for the property rather than for Philip Clitheroe. We should, of course, advise him to resist any claim that did not appear to us to be indisputable, and not to yield an inch to any claim unsupported by proofs."

"Well, what are you doing in the matter, Jim, if I may ask the question?"

"Doing," Jim repeated, in surprise, "what should we be doing but taking steps for the payment of succession duties, and that sort of thing."

"Then what on earth, Jim, are you employing detective people for? Why are you making inquiries about Tom Morson?"

Jim Ferris took his pipe out of his mouth and stared hard at his questioner. "I don't really know what you mean, Bob. We have employed no detectives; and as to Tom Morson, I never heard the name before in my life as far as I know."

"You didn't? Then who the deuce can it be, Jim?"

"My dear fellow, I shall be able to help you to guess perhaps when I have some conception of what you are talking about. At present I am utterly in the dark. I gather, however, that Miss Corbyn has come over, has consulted you, and has set about her search."

"That is so, Jim. She has been over here nearly five months. She came a few days after you spoke to me about her."

"Well, and what have you been doing?"

"Well, Jim, we have done a good deal, and we have discovered to what, in my mind, amounts to a certainty that the girl's mother was married to Mr. Corbyn."

"By Jove! you don't say so," Jim Ferris exclaimed. "You astound me. Confound it, this is a serious business, a deuce of a business. Wait a moment, old fellow; do not say anything more; let me think it over."

James Ferris was altogether unprepared for the news. In recommending Constance Corbyn to go to this friend, he had been acting in the kindly wish to save her expense, and had never for a moment dreamt that this would be the result. For some minutes he sat without speaking, and then he said,

"Well, I see no harm in hearing the story, Bob."

"I see no harm in it, or I should not have proposed to tell it you ; in any case, it will be my duty to lay it before you and your father, as solicitors to the estate, for the consideration of your client. Of course, if you were unscrupulous people, determined to defeat justice by any and every method, I should not show my hand to you, but as you and your client both desire that right should be done, I do not see why I should not do so. I should not have done this if the affair had not taken a most mysterious turn, and I had not discovered that someone is mysteriously and perhaps unscrupulously working against us. Now, I will tell you the facts."

Robert Harbut then related the journey down to Bath, the discovery of the locality where Constance Purcell's parents had resided, the interview with the clergyman, and the receipt of the packet of letters. He related how a postmark on the first letter, written an hour or two after the marriage, had given them the clue to the scene of marriage, how on searching the register at Folkestone it was found that the page on which the marriage had been inscribed had been cut out. How he had learnt from Madame Duport that Mr. Corbyn had been for some months after his marriage accompanied by a man who had been his scout at college, that the man's identity had been accidentally obtained, how that clue had been followed up, and the result.

"My dear Robert, you are a genius," James Ferris said, when he had finished, "and it is clear that you were cut out for a detective. It is extraordinary how you should have worked all this out. Of course, the story as it at present stands is a pure assumption, and the postmark on the letter the only real fact. A woman in writing to her parents after running away would probably endeavor to ease their minds by telling them that she was married. Even if she was married, it may not have taken place at Folkestone. They may have been married in London, or Canterbury, or anywhere else, on this morning—this day on which she writes. The fact that the page of the register at Folkestone happens to be missing is in itself no corroboration of the story. It is very unfortunate ; that is all I can say about it. The case, as far as you have brought it, is a highly ingenious one ; but you are still literally without a vestige of evidence that the marriage ever took place

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at Folkestone or elsewhere. What you have discovered may influence our own ideas on the subject, but it cannot in the smallest way affect the legal status of the owner of Corbyn Court."

"Of course, I see that," Robert Harbut said. "I myself am as convinced that this marriage took place as if I had witnessed it. And I am convinced—although I quite grant I may be wrong—that it was to destroy the evidence of that marriage that the leaf was extracted from the register. At first, my opinion was very strong that Algernon Corbyn, after having lost his wife, determined to ignore the marriage altogether, and that to prevent the possibility of its discovery managed somehow to cut out the missing leaf. At the time I thought so, it did not appear to me that anyone else could have known of the marriage, still less have any interest in suppressing the proof of it, but now there is evidence that a third party is at work, endeavoring to trace the whereabouts of this man Morson. I do not know what to think about it. The leaf may have been cut out twelve days ago or twelve years. We now come to the question I asked you first. Who is the party who is looking for Morson?"

"I have not the most remote idea. Certainly it is not Clitheroe."

"It is clear that, whoever it is, he must have been aware previously of the whole circumstances of the case; of the church at which the marriage took place, and the names of the witnesses to it, and was therefore able to go straight to the church and destroy the proof there, and to send straight to Oxford to find out the whereabouts of Morson."

"It is a strange business, however, and a most singular one. What do they want Morson for?"

"To see whether he was likely to be troublesome, I should say. Now that they have found out that, if still alive, he is in Australia, they, whoever they may be, will probably do nothing more in the matter. It would not be politic to let him know that Algernon Corbyn is dead, and that, the register of the marriage being lost, his evidence has become of great importance."

"Yes," Ferris said, "but you see you are assuming that whoever has set these detectives at work is hostile to Miss Corbyn, and that is by no means proved. Of course, if these are the people who have stolen the leaf, they are

endeavoring to prevent her from proving her rights ; but who would have any interest that way except Philip Clitheroe ? ”

“ Now, assuming that my first conjecture was not the right one, and that Corbyn himself did not cut out the leaf, the person now inquiring for Morson may be some one who has for years been cognizant of the business, some one to whom Corbyn may have confided it, or some pal of Morson's, who, hearing of Corbyn's death, sees his way to making a handsome thing out of proving that his daughter is the legal heiress to Corbyn Court. That certainly seems to me by far the most likely solution.”

“ Yes, I suppose it is,” James Ferris said more thoughtfully ; “ this is a most complicated business, look at it which way you will. Have you any objection to my telling the story to Clitheroe. I think that as you have told me he ought to know how the thing stands. Of course, till the result of the search which I suppose you are going to make for Morson is over, nothing can be done. If you get legal proof of the marriage, there is an end of the matter, but if you do not find him and can get nothing out of him, I am sure that Clitheroe will be glad to recognize that the young lady has a higher moral claim, although no legal one, than she would have as the undoubtedly illegitimate daughter of his uncle, and I can certainly promise you beforehand, in his name, that he will be ready to agree to any proposition that may seem to you fair, just and honorable for her future provision. Anyhow, I think he ought to be told the facts.”

“ Yes, I agree with you that he had better be told, James. We have nothing to conceal, and we are working openly, and he is not the man to take improper steps to thwart us. It would not be fair that he should be kept in ignorance of the probability of a storm suddenly bursting upon him. You told him, did you not, that you had recommended Miss Corbyn to place herself in my hands.”

“ Oh, yes, I told him, and he repeated what he said before, that he only wanted right to be done ; and was, indeed, genuinely distressed at the thought that he might be possibly usurping the rights of a friendless girl.”

They talked the matter over until James Ferris suddenly discovered that it was twelve o'clock, and then hurried away. Next day he wrote a line to Philip Clitheroe : “ I

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want to have a chat with you. The affair of the young lady at St. Malo has assumed a singular and altogether unexpected development. If you come up to-morrow, do not come to the office, the story is a long one ; dine with me at Bury street at half-past seven."

At twelve o'clock on the following day the answer came by telegram, "Shall be with you half-past seven."

"So you have got some news for me, Ferris," Philip said as he entered.

"I have a long yarn to tell you that I heard from Harbut last night. Of course, it was not told me officially. In fact, I may say at once that legally it amounts to nothing. Still, it is interesting, and there are some singular points in it ; but it is a long story to tell, and I am sure I shall make a much better telling of it, and you will appreciate it much more, if you put it by until we have finished dinner."

"Just as you like," Philip said, "I confess I am hungry, and I know how your landlady cooks. Well, your message surprised me. It was but the other day that you told me you had heard nothing whatever about it. Has this friend of yours made any discoveries ? If so, he must be a clever fellow, for as we agreed there seemed nothing to go upon."

"Harbut is one of the cleverest fellows I know, only, as he complains himself, he cannot get a fair start. He is singularly youthful in manner as well as in appearance, he has a keen sense of humor, he is always ready to turn anything into a joke, and when he does try to look grave he is so preternaturally serious that anyone can see that it is put on. Men who don't know him as I do, regard him as a sort of madcap boy. The result is he scarcely gets any business put into his hands. Of course, we have but little in his line. If we want an opinion we get one from one of the leaders, not because this opinion is worth any more, perhaps, than his, but because our clients are very much more influenced by it. Some day, Robert will get a chance : his leader will be away, and he will be able to show what he is made of, and when he does he will astonish them ; but when I tell the story you will see that what he has accomplished is something marvelous. However, we will leave the matter till we have finished dinner. Is there anything new down in your part of the world ? I



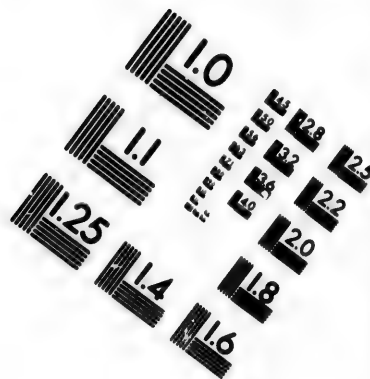
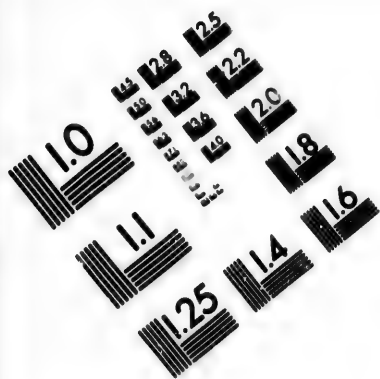
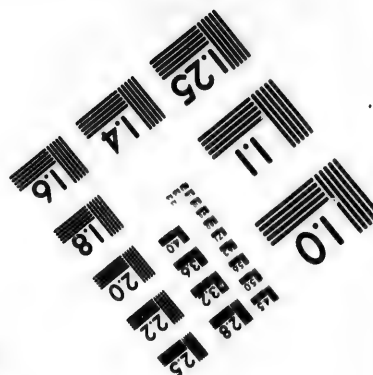
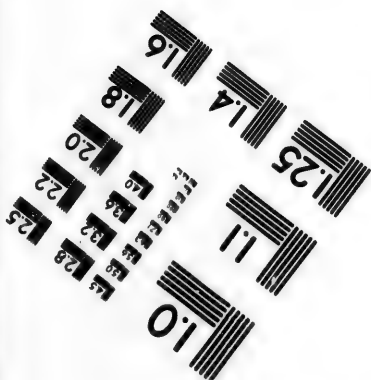
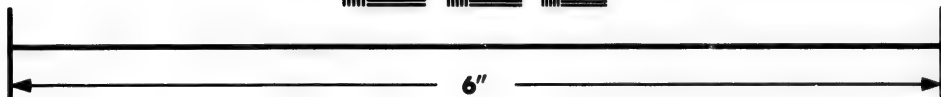
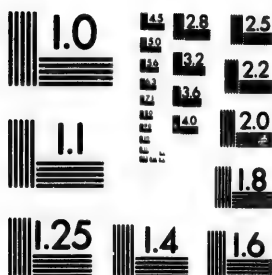


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hear from report that there is likely to be a vacancy in the Western Division. Who is likely to stand?"

A turn being thus given to the conversation, they chatted politics until the cloth was removed and coffee brought up.

"Now, Philip, take a mental note of any points that occur to you as I go on. Talk about them afterwards, then you will not interrupt the thread of the story."

James Ferris then related the facts he had learnt from Robert Harbut's first narrative, and elicited by his questions afterwards. Philip Clitheroe heard him in silence until he came to the point of the missing leaf from the register.

"You don't say so, Ferris," he broke in. "Good heavens, that girl doesn't think that it is my doing, I hope."

"As Harbut had enlightened her somewhat as to your character, Philip, you may be sure that the idea did not occur to her, and if it had done so it would have been dissipated by the further discoveries that have, as you will hear, been made."

"But this is amazing," Philip went on, when the narrative was brought to a conclusion. "Who on earth can be meddling in this matter; who could have known that this man Morson was likely to have been present at a marriage of my uncle's? Now you have told me the facts, please let me know the conclusions that Harbut and you have arrived at."

"Our opinion in most respects is the same, Philip. Of course, Harbut thinks that there was a marriage at Folkestone Church; equally, of course, I by no means admit this. It is a question of pure conjecture on either side. His opinion is that your uncle married the girl there, and after her death abstracted the proof of the marriage. My contention is, that it is more likely that the marriage, either a real one or a false one, by which the girl was deceived, took place in London, or wherever else they stopped, the morning when they started for Folkestone; but it would probably be in London, and the leaf of the register is just as likely to have been abstracted by someone interested in one of the other marriages recorded upon it as by someone interested in this of your uncle's. I grant, of course, that if the marriage did take place at Folkestone, the person

who cut out the leaf was probably your uncle. It is a horribly unpleasant thing to have to say of a dead man, but certainly the suspicions point strongly that way. Still I incline very much more to my own view, that there was either a real marriage or a sham one in London. I am inclined to think that it was a sham one, although here I allow I may be mistaken. We have nothing to go upon either way. The girl brought up in a country village could, of course, have been easily deceived by a ceremony performed by a sham clergyman in a private room. Such things have, we know, been done, and it would be no worse to credit your uncle with this than it is to credit him with cutting the leaf out of the register."

"I do not know that it is," Philip said gloomily; "in the one case he robbed a woman of her rights, and in the other a child. Still, Ferris, I don't believe he did either one or the other. My uncle was not a man I ever quite understood, or whom I ever warmed to, but I never knew him do an ungentlemanly action, and I certainly always credited him with a kindly disposition. I don't believe he was capable of either of these actions. Now, as to this Morson business, what do you make of that?"

"The only reasonable idea that occurs to me is, that it is some friend of your uncle's, who perhaps met him abroad with his supposed wife and servant, and to whom he confided the secret, and hearing that Corbyn was dead, and that you had come in for the property, he was endeavoring to get hold of Morson and find out if the woman was alive, and if there were any children. Another alternative is, that Morson may have told the story to some friend who is now trying to make money of it."

"Your first alternative, Jim, would imply that my uncle confessed to a marriage; if he had told a friend that he was not married to the girl, there would be no reason for our making inquiries now."

"I quite see that, Philip, and therefore I incline to the other hypothesis, that it is some friend of Morson's who had promised to let him know if there was any change at Corbyn Court, in order that he might put the screw upon your uncle if the opportunity should arise. In all these years he might very well have lost sight of Morson, and when he saw your uncle's death in the paper, might have set to work at once to endeavor to find him out."

"But again that rather points to a marriage. As long as my uncle was alive the man might attempt to make money out of him by threatening to divulge this story of the abduction of the village schoolmaster's daughter, but after his death the story would be useless as a means of making money unless there had been a marriage."

The lawyer was silent.

"To a certain extent that is so," he admitted reluctantly ; "but you see it is not for us to urge conclusions against ourselves. We are strong upon the point that no marriage took place, and that all the facts point to this. It is for them to prove the contrary, and though they have found out a variety of facts bearing upon the case, they are no nearer anything approaching a legal proof than they were when they started."

"But I am as anxious to get legal proof as they are." Philip said, standing up and leaning against the mantelpiece with his back to the fire. "I cannot go on holding this estate if I am convinced in my mind that this girl is the rightful heiress. I believe from what I have heard of this story of the girl's mother's bringing up, from the opinion of those who knew her then, and the conversation of the woman in whose house she died, that she was married, and I am the more convinced because I believe my uncle, although he was perhaps a weak man as well as a proud one, and although he acted a cowardly part in keeping the matter a secret for so many years, was not a rascal, and he would have been a rascal of the worst kind if he had either deceived this girl by a sham marriage, or cut that leaf from the register. If she lets the thing drop now do you think that I could? It is my business as much as hers, now, to get to the bottom of the matter. Do you think I could live at Corbyn Court, and be posing as a country swell, when I knew that I was a fraud, and that I was keeping a girl out of her rights? The thing is impossible."

"I was rather afraid that that was the light that you would take it in, Philip," James Ferris said after a long pause.

"Why, there is no other light in which one could take it. I feel so convinced myself that there was a marriage, that my own inclination would be to give up the estate at once."

"That would be impossible, as well as foolish," the lawyer said quietly. "The estate is entailed. You have

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but a life interest in it ; and if you give it up to-day, and die to-morrow, your next heir, whoever he or she may be, would at once claim possession ; and this young lady would have to prove her right to hold it. No, no, Philip. Let us do everything that is honorable, but do not let us be quixotic. I have acted throughout in what I may call an extra professional way, on the understanding with you that you were prepared to throw no unnecessary obstacles in the way, if this young lady could produce any legal proofs that she was the heir, and that you would, directly you were satisfied that this was the case, afford her every facility for taking possession. If you like to endeavor to satisfy yourself by doing what you can to get to the bottom of the matter, that is a matter for yourself."

"At any rate," Philip said, "I shall not, until this matter is settled, touch any of the rents of the estate or the interest of the securities in which my uncle's money is invested, beyond what is necessary for keeping up the Court, and which would, I suppose, be allowed to any trustee holding it for another ; and as a first step towards getting at the truth, I think we had better advertise for the register of the marriage in one of the London churches, on the day, the 21st of November did you not say, 1847."

"Harbut has done that already, he had no answers. I should say that there is really nothing for you to do at present, and that we must wait until we hear."

"Very well, I will remain a few days in town. I do not want to have any explanations with my mother until it becomes absolutely necessary. We have not moved into the Court yet, as the house in Bath is more cheerful, and there are only my uncle's old servants there, so that there will be nothing to be put down."

"I should say the best thing you could do would be to go for a run on the Continent. You will feel horribly unsettled with all this, and there is nothing like knocking about for preventing one from sitting down and worrying over things."

"I will think about it, Ferris. I don't know what I want just at present, or how I shall be feeling. I wish to goodness now that I had gone into the army or emigrated, or done something of that sort. It would have been a thousand times better for me in any case. Well, I will be going now, if you don't mind. I don't feel as if I could think

or talk of anything else but this, and if we were to talk all night about it, it does not seem to me that we should find ourselves any further on."

Constance Corbyn had not over-estimated her old nurse's devotion. She was, on her arrival at St. Malo, received with the greatest delight. M. Duport and Annette supposed that she had become convinced of the hopelessness of her search, and had come back to live with them. When, however, she told them her story, their faces fell. They were indeed greatly pleased to hear that it was probable that she might obtain the proofs of her mother's marriage, and so come into the estates to which she was entitled, but the voyage to Australia appeared to them to be a terrible undertaking. However, the next morning at breakfast Annette told Constance that she was firmly determined to accompany her.

"Victor thinks as I do, my dear, that it is quite out of the question that a young girl like you should be going all over the world by herself, and it is clearly my duty to go with you."

"But, my dear Annette, English girls very often go out to India, or China, or Australia by themselves, and there is no reason why I should not do so."

"If you were going out, Constance, to be a governess out there, I should have nothing to say against it. Victor and I would not think it right, but it is the custom of English girls and no harm might come of it, but you are not like others. If you obtain the proofs you want, and become a great lady, you must remember that everyone will become interested in your life, and if it were said that you were a young lady who had wandered about the world alone and unattended, it would create an altogether bad impression. Again, if you do not succeed, and come back here to live with us, such a tale will also be to your disadvantage. Frenchmen do not see things as you English do, and it would interfere greatly with your making a good marriage, which," she added, in reply to Constance's disdainful exclamation, "is a matter which it is the duty of Victor and I to provide for whatever you may think of it yourself; therefore, he thinks with me that it is my duty to go with you. I shall, after this frightful *mal de mer* is over, no doubt find the voyage pleasant, but in any case I go with you."

As Constance had quite expected this decision, she did not attempt to argue against it, but accepted Annette's offer with gratitude.

"You know I should like to have you with me, Annette, it will make all the difference in the journey, but it does seem hard dragging you away, and very hard on M. Duport, too."

"I should not let a daughter go on such a journey, my dear, and I am not going to let you go," Annette said positively, "so it is of no use talking any more about it. I did not like your staying behind in England, but you were in good hands, and I thought you could come to no harm, but this is a different matter altogether, besides it is only for four or five months, and we made up our minds when we started last time that we might be in England for a year before we could get to the bottom of everything."

So, after four days' stay at St. Malo, Constance returned to London with Annette and drove straight to Audley-street, where Miss Peyton was expecting her.

"Robert Harbut has arranged that you and Madame Duport shall call upon him to-morrow morning at his chambers, and then he will go with you to the steamer office, so that you can see on a plan where your cabin is ; he would have come here but he has a business appointment early."

"I would rather go there, Miss Peyton. I do like a walk through the streets and looking in the shops, and so does Madame Duport. We will start in good time, so as to be able to dawdle by the way, and stop when we like."

"Well, I cannot say I like it, my dear. I don't mind going down Bond Street or even Piccadilly, but I should not like the pushing and rush in the Strand."

"I don't think we were ever pushed, Miss Peyton, and we used to spend a great deal of our time shop gazing."

"Well, my dear, if you like to walk, of course, you can, but my advice would certainly be to take a cab."

"What time are we to be there, Miss Peyton ?"

"At twelve o'clock exactly ; he said twelve o'clock sharp, which means the same thing."

Ten o'clock next morning, Constance said, "You will think me very silly, Miss Peyton, but that boy has been sitting on the steps of the house ever since I came down at half-past eight."

"Then he is a very lazy boy, my dear, but there is nothing very curious about that, is there ?"

"Nothing curious at all in itself, but you know I told you that I thought we were watched all the time, and I cannot help thinking that they have begun again. Of course it may be only fancy, but I have been watching him closely, and it seems to me that he has been glancing over in this direction a good many times."

"He looks to me a dirty lazy sort of boy, just like other boys, my dear," Miss Peyton said, examining him through her glasses.

"Perhaps I am wrong, Miss Peyton, but you will have an opportunity for seeing presently. If he hangs about here until we go out, and then you see him get up and follow us, I think it will be strong evidence."

"Very strong if it is so," Miss Peyton agreed. "When you do go out I will stand back from the window and keep a sharp eye upon him."

During the next hour the boy moved once or twice, taking his seat on other door steps but never going out of sight. When Constance and Madame Duport started, Miss Peyton watched. She saw that when they had gone some fifty yards down the street he got up, glanced over at the house to see that no one was looking out, and then went off at a rapid step after them.

"That girl is right as she usually is," Miss Peyton said. "I wish now that we had sent Jarvis across to ask what he wanted, and to threaten to give him in charge of the police, but I don't suppose the young scamp would have minded if I had done so."

When Constance and her companion got to the bottom of the street, the former looked sharply round, the boy was some twenty paces behind them.

"I should like to box his ears," she said to Madame Duport, "but I suppose it would not do, Annette."

"Certainly, not, my dear. I know that sort of boy, he would throw himself down on the floor and yell and get a crowd round you in no time, or perhaps he would be impudent and take up a handful of dirt and throw it at you. These London street boys are the most abusive creatures, and use the most awful language."

"But it is very tiresome. I suppose there is nothing to do, Annette, but to take a hansom; the first one that comes along we will get into."

A few minutes later an empty hansom came up. "Drive to Oxford Circus, and drive quick, please," Constance said

as they took their seats. On arriving at the circus and paying the cabman, Constance looked round, the boy was leaning against a lamp-post a few yards off.

"There he is, Annette, how far do you think a boy like that could run?"

Annette shook her head, it was a matter beyond her experience.

"A long way, my dear, but I do not know how far; besides, I have seen them holding on behind carriages and getting help that way."

"Then it is no use wasting money," Constance said.

"I don't think it is, my dear, because, you see, if he is paid to watch us, very likely, when he found he couldn't run any further, he would take a cab, too."

"Well, we won't think anything more about him then. It has not taken us many minutes to get here, so we have plenty of time to walk down Regent-street, and along past the National Gallery, and up the Strand."

CHAPTER XIII.

"PUNCTUAL to the minute, Miss Corbyn," Robert Harbut said, as Constance and Madame Duport entered his office, "I suppose you came over yesterday."

"Yes, Mr. Harbut, and we are already watched, it is not a fancy on my part this time," and she related what had happened.

"Jackson," Robert Harbut said, and the clerk came in. "Will you go downstairs and look round when you get to the door, and if you see a dirty boy of about fifteen hanging about box his ears soundly. Never mind his yelling. Then take him by the collar and march him to the top of the lane, and tell the porter there that he is after no good, and that I say so; he will turn him out sharp enough then."

"Very good, sir," and Jackson went off much elated at this unusual order.

"We will give him five minutes to clear the road," Robert Harbut said, "and then we will be off."

Before the five minutes were passed the clerk returned. "There is no such boy anywhere about, sir, neither in our court or anywhere else."

"That is bad," Robert said, when the clerk had closed the door behind him.

"Why is it bad, Mr. Harbut?" Constance asked. "I should have thought it was good."

"Most likely his employers live not far off, Miss Corbyn. He watched you until he saw you turn into the Temple, and as you were watched before it would not be necessary for him to go further; he would make sure that you were coming to me, and would know, too, that you had seen him, and therefore someone else would be sent to take his place. However, we must risk that. Now shall we be off?"

"If you please, but I must tell you that we mean to go second class. I suppose there are second class passengers?"

"Yes, but I fancy that not many people go second class. People going backwards and forwards to Australia and India and China are generally well off, and I fancy that the second class are generally nurses, engineers going out to join a ship, and that sort of thing."

"That will do very well for us, Mr. Harbut. Annette has been a servant for years, and will not mind it, and certainly what is good enough for her is good enough for me, besides I should feel much more comfortable there than I should among a crowd of grand people. Last of all, and what is most important, we have no money to waste; it is Annette's hard-earned money we are risking, and not a penny must be spent that is not absolutely necessary. Another thing is, should we take our passage in our own name do you think? Possibly some one else might be going out in the same ship in search of this man, and he would recognize my name at once."

"I think that it would certainly be prudent for you to take your passage under another name, Miss Corbyn."

"Then please take our places as Madame Renan, that was Annette's maiden name, and Mademoiselle Renan. I suppose I have a right to take any name I like until I can prove my right to be called Corbyn."

Just as they were going up into Fleet-street, Constance looked back.

"There, Mr. Harbut, I am convinced that man behind us is one of those who was watching us when we were here before. I am sure I saw him several times opposite our lodgings." Robert Harbut hesitated and muttered a threat between his lips that accorded better with his present attire than with the wig and spectacles. Then he hurried forward, hailed a passing cab, pushed the ladies in and followed them, saying to the driver, just as the man behind came up, "King's Cross, drive sharp." He looked round out of the window when he got to the top of Chancery Lane, a hansom was following with a solitary man inside, but it was too far behind for him to recognize the face. He turned to the cabman:

"Look here, cabby," he said, "draw up sharp the instant you get round the corner; here is half a crown; we shall jump out, and then you drive straight on up Gray's Inn Lane. Keep ahead of that hansom behind if you can. You needn't go further than the Yorkshire Grey, there you can draw up and get some beer."

A moment later the cab turned into Holborn ; to Robert's vexation there was an omnibus just coming along, and a few seconds' time was lost.

"Jump out quick," he said the moment the cab stopped. "Go into that shop and buy a pair of gloves ; drive on, cabby, as sharp as you like."

The ladies entered the shop, while at the same moment Robert Harbut ran into the public-house at the corner, and stood looking through the partly closed door. A moment later the cab came along, its pace had evidently been greatly increased the moment the four-wheeler turned the corner. The young barrister gave an angry exclamation.

"Confound the fellow, he will guess the cab has stopped by its being so short a distance ahead."

He set out now and followed the cab with his eyes. The hansom was driving fast and would catch the four-wheeler long before it arrived at the Yorkshire Grey. He turned sharply into the shop where the ladies were.

"Take the first pair," he said to Constance ; "every moment is of importance."

A minute later they were out of the shop, and crossing the road they entered an omnibus.

"I think we have thrown them off the scent now, Miss Corbyn. I have no doubt by this time the fellow knows that the cab is empty."

Had Robert Harbut remained another moment watching the hansom instead of entering the shop, he would have seen it draw up suddenly, and the man inside it leap out, throw a shilling to the driver, and hurry back towards the corner of Chancery-lane.

"You are not so sharp as you thought, my fine fellow," he muttered between his lips. "I guessed that was a false direction and that you were trying to throw me off your track, one could see with half an eye the cab must have stopped directly it got round the corner."

As soon as the party had entered the omnibus the man, following them closely, climbed up on to the top.

On issuing out from the P. & O. office after engaging berths by the Mandalay for the following Thursday, Robert Harbut put the ladies into a Brixton omnibus in Gracechurch Street, and then proceeded straight to the office of Ferris and Son.

"Can you spare me five minutes, James ?"

"Ten if you want them, Robert, what is it?"

"I told you that Miss Corbyn had suspected that she has been followed ever since she came to England. I was inclined to put it all down to fancy, but to-day I found that she was right. This beats me altogether, who in the world can be acting against us?"

"I can't tell, Robert. Those inquiries at Oxford puzzle me altogether, but this is extraordinary."

"Well, we know that at Oxford it was someone who said he had been sent down by Wilkins' people; at least, their name was on the card he gave the porter. The fellow was careless in letting out the name of his employers, but probably they never anticipated that we should be going there too. Do you know anything of these fellows?"

"A little; I believe they do their work as well as any of these private detective firms. They got some information together very well for a client of ours who employed them."

"Would you mind seeing them, Jim. It is no use my going to them because they would laugh in my face, but as a solicitor, and one who perhaps might one day throw a job in their way, you might get something from them."

"Well, I will try anyhow, Robert," James Ferris said. "We will take a hansom to their place, and you can wait outside while I will go in. I saw Wilkins two or three times when he was working that case, he is an ex-sergeant of police, and a pretty shrewd fellow. I don't know whether he is susceptible to a bribe or not, but it may be that a twenty-pound note may induce him to open his lips a little."

James Ferris on sending up his name was at once shown into the little room which formed the private office of Private Detective Wilkins, in Chancery Lane.

"Good-morning, Mr. Ferris; is there anything I can do for you?" Wilkins was a strongly-built man, with square shoulders, and seemed still to be wearing his police uniform. His face was somewhat heavy, but there was a shrewd look in the grey eyes under the shaggy eyebrows.

"Not regular business this time, Mr. Wilkins, but I want some information, which, of course, I am ready to pay for if you feel at liberty to afford it, as to a case in which you are engaged."

A slight smile stole over the detective's face, and he shook his head.

"I don't want any breach of confidence," the lawyer went on; "however, I will tell you what I do want, and you will see whether you can give it without what you consider a breach of confidence. It is not a matter in which I am professionally engaged, but in which I am, I may say, personally interested, and I am willing to give twenty pounds to have my curiosity set at rest."

"Let us hear what it is, Mr. Ferris."

"I want to know why on earth you are tracking the movements of those two women from St. Malo."

"I can answer that question easily enough, Mr. Ferris. I have not the most remote idea in the world."

"You have not," James Ferris repeated, in astonishment.

"Not the slightest. I simply received instructions: 'Send over to St. Malo, see if any Englishman visits a Monsieur and Madame Duport living there with an adopted daughter, who goes by the name of Corbyn. If they leave St. Malo and come to England have every movement watched.' You will understand that if I did know what I was watching them for I should not tell you, but as I don't know I do not mind doing so. The very day after my man got there you visited them; three days afterwards they came over to London, and I have kept them in sight since."

"All that I am aware of, Mr. Wilkins, but it is the motive of the thing that puzzles me; I cannot for the life of me make out who is interested in their movements—that is what I am ready to give twenty pounds to know."

"If I knew myself, Mr. Ferris, I should not tell you for ten times that sum, but in the present case, my client, if I may call him so, has not taken me in the slightest degree in his confidence. I received my instructions by letter, enclosing a handsome fee in bank notes. My instructions were to post each day any discoveries I might make to Mr. Zacharia Smith, at a post office in one of the Midland towns, where it would be called for. The name, of course, is an assumed one, and I don't think it right to give you the name of the town, as you might put someone to watch who calls for letters addressed to that name. I receive letters with that signature posted in that town, but as my client is evidently a very cautious gentleman, I should think it likely that he does not live there, but that some agent of his receives and re-posts my letters to him, and posts his letters to me. I don't know whether that is worth twenty pounds to you."

"Well, yes, I think it is," Ferris said; "and I will send you a cheque across from my office. It was the same employer, of course, who sent your man down to Oxford to enquire about Tom Morson."

The detective nodded.

"Do you guess who my client is?"

"Not in the least."

"It is the most mysterious affair I ever came across, Harbut," the young lawyer said when he returned to his friend. "Wilkins declares that he does not know in the least who his client is."

And he repeated the substance of the conversation. "There is no doubt of one thing, whoever he is, he must have known from the first all that we have learnt since. He was aware of the existence of the girl at St. Malo before we were, for the Duports were watched before I went over, and they were before you in their inquiries about Morson. How did you find that you were watched to-day?"

"That plucky girl has made up her mind to start for Australia to try and find this man Morson, and I was going with them to take their passages by the Mandalay, which sails next Thursday, when she recognized a man behind us as one of the men who had been following her. My first impulse was to punch his head, but I thought better of it." And he then related the steps he had taken to throw their pursuer off the track. "I don't feel at all sure that I succeeded," he added in conclusion.

"I should doubt it too," Ferris agreed. "I think it quite on the cards that a letter will be posted this afternoon to Mr. Zacharia Smith, saying that the two women have taken berths for Sydney in the Mandalay. Do they go under their own names?"

"No, they are entered on the list as Madame and Mademoiselle Renan."

"That will make no difference. Wilkins will only have to send down some well-dressed man to the office to look at the list of passengers under some pretence or other, and he will at once spot the names of two women together among the last entries. So she is going out to Australia. I told you she was a girl who would carry the thing through."

"She is a splendid girl," Robert Harbut said enthusiastically. "If it wasn't that I had been already snapped

up, I should certainly fall head over heels in love with her."

"It is a pity Philip cannot meet her, and fall in love with her, it would be by far the best solution of the business."

"When she comes back you must try and bring it about," Robert Harbut laughed. "Where is he now?"

"I had a letter from him this morning; he is worrying himself about this thing immensely; he told me he intended to stop at Folkestone on his way back from Paris, and to have a look at the register himself, and try to ascertain from the look of the cut how long ago it was done."

"I examined it by a microscope the clergyman lent me, but could not perceive any difference of color at the edge. If it had been a tear I daresay it would have shown it, but with a clean cut edge there was no judging; to my mind it looked old, the clergyman and the clerk both thought that it was fresh, but I really do not think that there was any telling."

"I shall hear Philip's opinion this evening, I expect," James Ferris said; "he is pretty sure to look me up; he said if I had no news to give him he should go down to Bath by the first train in the morning."

James Ferris had just finished his dinner when he heard a knock at the door. A minute later Philip Clitheroe was shown in.

"Well, Philip, had a gay time in Paris?" he asked, and then stopped abruptly. "Why, what is the matter, old man; are you ill? Has anything gone wrong with you?"

He might well be surprised. Philip Clitheroe was as pale as death, and seemed to have aged ten years since Ferris had last seen him. There was an expression of intense pain on his face, the light had gone from his eyes, his mouth was set and hard. He made no direct reply to the questions, but with a little wave of the hand sat down in a chair in front of the fire without even removing his hat, and stared into the flames.

"What is it, Philip?" his friend again asked, this time in low tones, for he was absolutely awed at the look upon the young fellow's face. "What on earth is the matter, old man?"

"I have had a little shock," he said in a dull tone. "I will tell you presently all I can."

Jim Ferris was confounded, and stood for a moment silently looking at Philip. Then he turned to the table and

filled a glass with sherry. "Drink this, Philip," he said. "You look worn out ; it will do you good."

Philip mechanically did as he was told, took the glass in a shaking hand, raised it to his lips, and swallowed the contents. It was five minutes before he spoke. Then he said, in a quiet, dull tone :—

"I don't know that I can tell you anything beyond this : I have renounced my right altogether and wholly to the Corbyn estates in favor of my cousin, Miss Corbyn, whom I wish everyone to know I recognize absolutely as the lawful heir to the property and the legitimate daughter of my uncle. I desire you and your father to prepare a deed to that effect at once—on Monday, if you can. I want it done at once, because I am going away. I do not want to be asked why I do this. I do it and that is enough."

His hearer's impression at once was that Philip had worried over this business until his brain had suddenly given way, and he said soothingly—

"Of course, I will do as you wish, Philip. We will make the arrangements as soon as possible. And where are you going to ?"

"Away—somewhere, it does not matter where ; America or Australia, anywhere where I can work for an honest living. My God," he cried, rising suddenly with a passionate gesture ; "how I am suffering," and standing up he put his elbows on the mantel-piece and buried his face in his hands, while deep sobs burst from him.

James Ferris stood watching him, unable to decide whether it was best to address him or not. Either he was mad or some terrible misfortune had taken place ; what that misfortune could be James Ferris could not even guess. Had he discovered in some strange way that this marriage had taken place ? but even had he done so he would not have taken it to heart like this, for he had all through been prepared to relinquish the estates if proof of the marriage was obtained. Still this did not look like madness. At last Philip turned round again and held out his hand to him. "You must think I am mad, James, but I am not. I cannot tell you what has happened, I shall never be able to tell you. I almost wish that I was mad, but I never was saner in my life. I meant what I have said just now. I shall leave the country for years. I desire that my cousin should take possession of Corbyn

Court. I think that proofs of the marriage will be forthcoming. If they should not, I charge you to use every possible means, and to stint no money, in endeavoring to find witnesses to the marriage. We can talk about other things to-morrow. I know you have a spare bed here. I do not feel up to going to my hotel. Will you tell them to get the room ready for me. I will eat a crust of bread and have a cup of tea if you will order it for me while they are getting the room ready. I have eaten nothing since I breakfasted, before starting, at Boulogne, Do not ask me any questions, that's a good fellow."

Jim Ferris rang the bell, and ordered that the room should be got ready at once for his friend. The next half-hour they talked together on different subjects, of the weather in Paris, of the run across the Channel, and other matters. As soon as Philip had drunk his tea, he rose, lighted the candle the servant had placed on a side-table, held out his hand silently to James Ferris, nodded and went off, James leading the way to the bedroom prepared for him.

"This confounded business is enough to drive a man out of his mind," James Ferris said, as on his return to his room he sat before the fire. "It is a mystery from beginning to end, and this finishes it. Philip seems certainly sane enough, though what can have occurred to shake him up in this way I cannot imagine. What on earth will my father say when I tell him on Monday that Philip has made up his mind to give up the estates and go abroad? I am sure he will refuse point blank to have any hand in carrying out this arrangement."

Philip Clitheroe had indeed experienced a terrible shock. The more he had thought the matter of the missing leaf of the register over, the more he was convinced that Ferris was mistaken, and that his uncle could not have been such a rascal as to endeavor to destroy proofs of his own marriage. He had not had the courage to acknowledge it during his father's lifetime, and had put off, as long as he could, facing the talk that such an announcement would have excited afterwards, but he intended, Philip felt convinced, to acknowledge the girl as his heiress sooner or later.

"I am convinced he never cut out this leaf; someone else has done it," and so Philip resolved to question the

clerk much more closely than Robert Harbut seemed to have done, and with this intent broke his journey at Folkestone, and leaving his portmanteaus at the station on the pier, walked to the Parish Church and was soon at the residence of William Truscott, the clerk.

"I have come to have a talk with you, Mr. Truscott, about that missing leaf in the register."

"I suppose I shall hear a lot of that before we have done," the clerk said in a tone of vexation. "The rector is in a great taking about it, and so am I. My father, who was here before me, was a most careful man about the registers, and so have I been myself since I have had them under my charge, and now to think that a leaf has been taken out, and that it was never noticed until the other day. Are you here in the interest of the same parties that were here the other day?"

"Yes, we are all in the same interest," Philip replied. "First of all, I should like to have a look at this register myself. I am entitled to that, I believe, on paying the fee of one shilling. I have brought a strong glass with me to try and find out whether it is of recent date."

The clerk took the keys and accompanied Philip to the church, the safe was opened, and the volume produced. Philip carried it to the window, bent it back to the fullest extent, and examined the edge of the missing sheet with the glass.

"No," he said, "I cannot form a positive opinion. It certainly looks newer than the rest of the paper, but from its having been cut with so sharp a knife it is smoother than the face of the paper, and therefore reflects the light somewhat better. There is, as far as I can see, nothing to guide us here. Suppose we sit down and talk it over for a minute or two. From what we know of the matter, it is probable that either it was cut out eight or ten years ago, or that it has been cut out in the last few months or so. Now can you remember who has been here to examine it lately?"

"I can't tell you who have been here," the clerk replied, "but I can tell you how many people have come," and he took out a small cash book from the safe. "This is an account of the cash I have received since the first of last December. There have been four inquiries altogether; one by letter for a marriage certificate, one personal in-

qu岸y about birth registers, one letter for copy of register of burial, one personal for marriage certificate."

"There have, in fact, been only two personal visits."

"That is so, sir."

"It might be either of them," Philip said, "you see the volumes all have the number of the year to which they relate on their backs, so that when a person inquires for a birth certificate he could, if he happened to be alone here, take out any of the books and cut out a leaf. What sort of a person was it who came for a copy of this certificate of birth?"

"Let me see. It was a young man. He mentioned while I was copying the registers of the birth that he happened to be staying down here, and as he was going to be married shortly, and meant to insure his life, he thought he might just as well get a copy of the certificate. His name was Armstrong, I remember. He was born in 1844. December, 1844, I think it was."

"Was he alone here at all?"

"No, sir. I never leave anyone alone here."

"Well, now as to the other?"

"The other was a lady, sir. She was tall and dressed in mourning, and had a thick veil on—quite the lady I should say. She said she wanted to look in the register for a marriage in the year 1853. That was in the next volume to this, you see. This is for the four years up to the year 1851. She could not find what she was looking for, though she went through the marriages during those four years."

"Then she must have been in here nearly half-an-hour, and she was never left alone?"

"Lor', no, sir," the clerk began, and then stopped suddenly, and his usually ruddy face lost every tinge of color.

"She was alone," Philip said.

"Well, she was for a moment now one thinks of it," the clerk admitted. "It was not for a minute, no nor half a minute; she was sitting on this chair looking at the book and I was standing behind her when she said, 'there is someone calling you, I think, Mister Truscott.' Thinking it was the rector who had come along and found the church door open, I hurried out. I did not see him in the church, and just went out of the porch to look. There was no one there and I went straight back again. I was not out half a minute altogether I am prepared to take my affidavit."

"Half a minute would be ample," Philip said. "She knew by the book she had before her where the notice she wanted would be found in the next volume. As she sat she could reach out and take it from its shelf. She had only to turn to the date, cut out the leaf, replace the book on the shelf and thrust the leaf under her cloak. It would not take ten seconds. You see by these other cut leaves how strongly and hastily it was done. There is no longer any doubt as to how the leaf was lost now. This is a very serious matter, both for those concerned in it and for yourself, Mr. Truscott."

"I see it is," the clerk said in great distress. "I know I ought not to have gone out and left anyone alone with the registers, but it was done so natural it never entered my mind. She seemed just easy and gentle. 'I think that there is someone calling you, Mr. Truscott,' and out I ran without thinking of it for a moment; and if you hadn't asked me about it, I should never have thought of it again. When I came back she was sitting just as I had left her, running her finger down the pages, reading the names; and no one would ever suspect a lady of such an action as that."

"Well, try and remember all you know about her. That is the only thing you can do to help to undo the damage you have caused. What was she like?"

"Well, as I have said, sir, she was tall, and held herself very upright—out of the way stiff, I should say."

"What age was she?"

"It is difficult to judge ladies' ages when they have got their veils down, sir, but I should judge her between forty and fifty. I could see her hair at the back of her bonnet as I stood beside her, and leant on the table, and it was what I should call sandy, not red or yellow, but just about the color of sand. Is there anything the matter, sir; do you think you know the lady?"

Philip did not answer for a moment. The description had brought up his mother before his eyes. For a moment his heart seemed to stop beating, then with a great effort he said, "I know someone like your description, but it could not possibly be her. Go on, was there anything else you remember?"

"Only her hand," the clerk replied, "her dress was all black, quiet black, but nothing as one would remember,

but she took her glove off when she began to examine the book. I thought that it was to turn the leaves over better, but I suppose now that it was to be able to use it quicker for getting out the knife. She had a marriage ring and three rings over it. I had plenty of time to notice them. I wondered what they cost. The top ring was pearls, and the next had four stones, two of them were dark red. I do not know whether they were rubies, but they looked deeper than rubies, and the other two were diamonds. The ring next to the wedding ring was mostly gold, with one diamond in the middle, with some little blue stones—turquoise, I think they call them, round it."

Every vestige of color had flown from Philip's face now, and the hand that rested on the table grasped it as if for support. The little vestry seemed to whirl round; but he came of a good race, and when the clerk looked up from the table on which he had been picturing the hand he described, Philip had pulled himself together.

"Thank you for your description. It may prove useful to us. I don't know that I have any other questions to ask you. I should not leave people alone here in future if I were you."

Had not the clerk been greatly scared at the thought of the pains and penalties he might have entailed upon himself by leaving a searcher alone with the books, and so enabling a felony to be executed, he could not have but have been struck with the change of voice and manner of his visitor. He was, indeed, dimly conscious of it, and in speaking of the matter to the rector—for it was too serious a one to keep from his knowledge—he said: "I think the gentleman who called must be greatly interested in that marriage, for he seemed quite shaken like when he found out how the leaf had been taken."

"Well, I hope, Truscott, it will be a lesson to you," the rector said, severely; "it is a most serious business, and for anything we know the loss of this register may involve very important consequences. If the matter ever goes into a court of law, and you are called as a witness—which you are pretty sure to be—I should be very sorry to be in your position."

Philip Clitheroe on leaving the church kept on straight through the town and up the hill; he scarce knew where he was going, but seemed impelled only by a desire to be

alone. He turned off almost mechanically from the main road soon after he left the town, and after walking for half-an-hour, found himself on an open down. He stood for a moment and looked away to the south over the sea.

"What am I to do?" he murmured to himself. "To think, only to think, that my mother should have done this. It is awful. Here have I been keeping this from her, and she must have known it all along. She has been doing this terrible thing for me; as if any good could come from a crime which cheated a girl out of her rights. Oh, mother, how could you?"

For hours Philip walked up and down trying to think; the time passed unheeded; the train by which he had intended to go up to town steamed away unnoticed, and it was not until late in the afternoon that he turned and made his way back with stumbling steps to the station, where he walked up and down on the platform until the six o'clock train started. Then he threw himself into the corner of a carriage, and with his hat pulled far over his eyes, remained without moving until Charing Cross was reached. It was well for him that he was utterly exhausted when he lay down that night, so exhausted that sleep soon came to him. He was astonished when he was awoken by a knocking at the door and found that he had slept without moving for well-nigh twelve hours.

"Will you come down to breakfast, Philip; or shall I bring you up a cup of tea, and let you have another snooze before you get up?"

"I will be down in twenty minutes," he said leaping out of bed, and speaking, as James Ferris noticed, in a voice more like his own.

"I think he is better," he said to himself. "I hoped he would get a good night after all that. Well, it is more than I have had. I never was so puzzled over anything in my life. What on earth can have happened to him?"

The long night and a cold bath had effected wonders for Philip. His face was very grave when he went down, but the air of utter despondency had passed off. Nothing was said at breakfast as to the talk of the night before, but when they had lighted their pipes and drawn round the fire, Philip said, "I suppose you thought I must be mad last night, and I was almost, but what I said I meant and mean still. Something has happened that convinces me

absolutely that my uncle was married, and that my cousin is lawful heiress of Corbyn Court. What that something is I cannot tell you, and never shall be able to tell you. At any rate, I relinquish the estate at once in her favor, and intend, as I said, to go abroad at once, at any rate for some years. It is possible that evidence of my cousin's legitimacy may be forthcoming, if not, you must do your best to obtain it, for, as you said, should anything happen to me, her rights would be disputed by the next heir. I suppose it will take some little time to draw up the papers, assigning my rights to the property to my cousin."

"Yes, I should think it will take some little time, Philip."

"Yes, well, I don't want to stop for that. I want to be off at once. I want to be out of it all. Therefore I will get you yourself to draw out some formal paper of renunciation, which I will sign; then after I have gone you can speak to your father about it, and get the deeds regularly drawn up, and send them out to me to be executed. In that way nothing whatever need be said about the matter to anyone until I have gone. I want to get away without any leave-taking, or wondering, or remarks."

"I suppose you know what you are doing, Philip," James Ferris said, after a pause. "Of course, to me the whole thing is inexplicable."

"I know what I am doing, James, worse luck; and there is no help for it."

"What are you going to do about Clitheroe?"

"If you will draw up a power of attorney, I will authorize you to receive all rents and act for me in my absence. The house must be shut up. My mother's own income is sufficient to keep up the house in Bath, and after paying the interest on the mortgages, the balance of the rents can accumulate and you can pay off the mortgages one by one, and if I ever return Clitheroe will be clear."

James Ferris saw that it was useless to argue, unable as he was to guess at the reasons by which Philip was influenced.

"You will sell my hunters and the carriage horses, and I will get you to advance me two hundred and fifty now upon them if you do not mind. I won't have the furniture at Clitheroe sold. You had better put a man and woman in to take care of the place."

"Where are you thinking of going, Philip?"

"I don't care whether it is Australia or America. I think Australia, because I am less likely to meet anyone I know there than in Canada or the States."

James Ferris sat thinking for some time.

"If you go to Australia, Philip," he said at last, "you might make a point of looking up that fellow Morson. If there was, as you now say, a marriage, there is little doubt he was present at it, or, at any rate, could give evidence that would go far to prove it."

"By Jove, you are right," Philip exclaimed, with a new light in his face. "That decides me; it will be something to attend to first."

"Let me think, what was his address? I have got it in my pocket book," Ferris said, "I put it down when Harbut told me of it. Ah, here it is: T. Morson, near Brisbane."

"Have you got yesterday's paper?" Philip asked eagerly, "let us see if there is a ship just sailing for Brisbane."

"You may have to wait some time for a ship direct, but the Australian mail goes on Thursday; and once at Melbourne you will have no difficulty in getting a coasting steamer to Sydney and then on to Brisbane; and you will be there, perhaps, a couple of months earlier than you would in a sailing ship."

"There is plenty of time for that. I will write home to-day for my guns and shooting clothes; they must be sent off by passenger train. They will get the letter in the afternoon, and the things will be up on Tuesday. I intend to change my name, Ferris. Clitheroe is not a very common name and I want to take a fresh start. If I had gone by a sailing ship I should have gone third class; I do not want to run the risk of meeting anyone I know and be asked questions. The P. and O. don't carry thirds, so I shall go second."

A momentary look of satisfaction and amusement flashed across his companion's face. Had Philip been going in any other ship he would have combated the idea of his going second class, but he was now delighted that Philip had decided on this.

"Then you do not intend to go back to Bath?" he asked.

"No," Philip replied shortly. "I don't want to stir out of this room, except just to get a few things that I shall

want on the voyage, until I go, that is if you will take me in until then?"

"With pleasure."

"Mind, Ferris, I want no one to know anything about this affair until I am gone. You understand that?"

"Quite, my dear fellow. You can reply upon it, I will not breathe a word to anyone. Now what are we going to do all day? I think the best thing will be to run down to Brighton, dine there and come up in the evening. We shall find it a long day if we sit here doing nothing."

"That will just suit me, James. I do not want to have time to think until I get fairly at sea. I shall have plenty of time for that afterwards."

The three days passed rapidly. On Wednesday Philip signed a document assigning to Constance Corbyn all rights that he might have in the Corbyn property, and stating his conviction that she was the legal owner of the estate. This was to be sent in on Friday to Robert Harbut. In the afternoon he sat down to write to his mother.

"My dear mother," he began, "it is with inexpressible pain that I write to you. I know all. I have been to Folkestone Church and know that you have been there before me, and that you carried away the leaf of the register containing the marriage of my uncle with Constance Purcell. Oh, mother, how could you do it? How could you stoop to such a crime? A thousand Corbyn Courts would be dearly bought indeed at the cost of such dishonor. I know that it was for my sake that you did it, that it was love for me that drove you to it, and it is not for me to reproach you with a crime undertaken for my sake; but with the weight of it on me I can never look people in the face again.

"I am going abroad, and shall change my name, and I implore you to take the only step that can ever restore peace or happiness to us. Send at once that leaf of the register to Robert Harbut, of the Middle Temple: he will know what to do with it. It would be better and nobler, and would go far to redeem the fault if you would yourself see Constance Corbyn—Robert Harbut has her address—and give her the proof of her mother's marriage, own your fault, and throw yourself on her mercy. But if you cannot bring yourself to do this, which would of all things be best, send the leaf anonymously to Harbut. So only can we

ever come together again. In time, when I hear Constance is installed at Corbyn Court, proved beyond all doubt to be my uncle's heiress, I may bring myself to come back. Otherwise, I shall never return to England. God help us both, mother. I beseech you, I implore you, set right this terrible wrong at whatever cost to your pride and your feelings."

"Please post that letter for me on Friday, Ferris. Mind I do not wish even my mother to know what name I have taken, or where I have gone. Directly I reach Brisbane I shall write to you, and you can then forward to me documents for signature and any letters there may be to send."

James Ferris asked no questions; he had been pondering the matter over in all lights. He knew that there was a deep affection between Philip and his mother, and the fact that Philip should not return to Bath and should be keeping his mother in ignorance of his intention of going abroad, had struck him as strange and unnatural, and at last the truth had flashed upon him. Philip had been to Folkestone and had there discovered something. It was certainly not that the Corbyn estates were involved that had so utterly depressed him, and had determined him to exile himself. It was something that he considered vastly more serious than this. Was it possible that he could have discovered that it was his mother who had abstracted the missing leaf? This would account for all that had hitherto seemed so inexplicable in the affair. Mrs. Corbyn might have learnt from her brother that he was married, and all the particulars of that marriage. She might have known that except in Folkestone Church no evidence existed of that marriage. She might have removed that evidence and set detectives to watch every step taken by Constance, and might also have instructed them to take steps to discover whether Morson, the only living evidence as to the marriage, was still alive. It was a terrible suspicion to entertain of Philip Clitheroe's mother, and yet turning it over again in his mind, Jim Ferris acknowledged that it seemed the only possible explanation of the events that had been so puzzling him, and of this sudden determination on the part of Philip.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was well for Constance Corbyn that her companion had had some experience in traveling, for the confusion upon the arrival of the train at Southampton Docks appeared to her to be overwhelming. In half-an-hour, however, they were in possession of their little cabin on board the Mandalay, and Constance, who at one time had despaired of getting their trunks out of the chaos of baggage, found that they had all their belongings safely collected. For half-an-hour she assisted Annette in putting things tidy, and then the latter said, "The bell has rung and visitors have gone ashore, so we shall be starting at once. You had better run on deck, dear, and see what there is to be seen. I will finish putting things to rights."

When Constance reached the deck she found that the vessel was being warped out of the dock, while a small crowd of people moved along abreast of her waving their hands and handkerchiefs. She leaned against the bulwarks watching them and then turned to look at what was going on round about her. As she did so her eyes fell upon a young man in a velveteen coat, leaning against the bulwarks a few yards away. The face was familiar to her, and she started as she recognized it. The expression indeed was strangely altered since she had last seen it. Then it was a pleasant face with a frank good-humored expression as its owner laughed and chatted with others standing round him; now there was a stern hard look on it, the lips were set and the eyes fixed frowningly on the shore; but Constance was certain that she was not mistaken. She had looked so earnestly at the face before that it seemed imprinted in her memory, and indeed it was but a fortnight since she had seen it.

It was Philip Clitheroe who stood beside her, and after assuring herself of the fact, Constance turned and walked aft to the foot of the ladder leading up to the poop, and crossed to the other side of the vessel.

What did it mean? What was Philip Clitheroe doing on board the Mandalay? He was evidently a passenger. There was but one explanation of it that she could see, he had deceived his friend Ferris, and while pretending to be perfectly willing to recognize her rights at once, if she could produce any legal proof of her mother's marriage, he had been secretly working against her. He had had his spies upon her at St. Malo, and had had her watched all the time that she was in London.

It was he, no doubt, who had abstracted the leaf of the register, and most likely he knew that she and Robert Harbut had been down there and had discovered that it was missing. Then probably for a time he thought he was safe, but he would have learned from the butcher at Woodstock that she had got upon Morson's traces, and again she had been watched. He could hardly know that she had obtained the address from the woman at Banbury, but as soon as he had learnt that she was starting for Australia he would guess that she had in some way or other obtained it, and was on her way to see this man; therefore, he had resolved to go out himself in the same ship and be beforehand with her.

As doubtless he had supposed that after going down to Folkestone she had given up the search as hopeless, and had taken the position of companion to Miss Peyton with the intention of earning her living in that way, the watch upon her would probably for a time have been abandoned, and he would be ignorant that she had gone down to Bath and might have seen him there. He would then reckon that while he would know her she could have no suspicion whatever of his identity, and he should be able to hoodwink her with the greatest ease.

"He is a monster of deceit," she said, angrily to herself. "If anyone had told me at Bath that he was a villain I should have laughed at the idea. It looked such a frank, honest face, and I was absolutely fool enough for a moment to fancy——" and she flushed up hotly at the remembrance that she had for a moment thought that Miss Peyton's hint as to the way in which matters might be settled satisfactorily to both parties would not be so repugnant to her as it had seemed when it was mooted.

"The man has two faces," she said; "the one I saw at Bath, which I suppose he can assume at pleasure; the

other that which I saw just now, a hard, sombre, moody face—the true face of a man who would deface a register and rob a girl. Well, I am forewarned now, and can fight him with his own weapons, and he will not find his task as easy as he expects. I thought that visit to Bath a fortunate one before, now I feel that it was providential indeed. No wonder he was so anxious to get me to accept an annuity when he knew all along where my mother's marriage had taken place. I was to have a sop thrown me to keep me quiet. I suppose I shall see a great deal of him on the voyage; of course he has come in the second class so as to keep me under his eye. I had better not tell Annette of the discovery I have made. She would never be able to bring herself to be decently civil with him, and I must not let him suspect that I know him."

"I am ashamed of myself," she said, as a tear rolled down her cheek, "to think that I should have been so taken in." For, indeed, since the finding of Morson's address in Australia, and the strong prospect that she should be able to prove her mother's marriage, Constance had thought a good deal of Philip Clitheroe. It would be so hard to turn him out of the estate he had for years believed would be rightfully his own, and she had wondered, if all went well, if some plan could not be hit upon by which, while she was recognized as Algernon Corbyn's daughter, and perforce heiress of Corbyn Court, the bulk of the income might be his.

"Well, there is one comfort," she said, angrily passing her hand across her cheek, "I need have no compunction now in pushing my rights to the utmost."

The steamer was now fairly out into Southampton waters, the tug threw off the hawser, and the screw of the Mandalay, which had been slowly turning since she had passed through the dock gates, began to revolve more rapidly. There was a cheer, the waving of hats and handkerchiefs by a party on board the tug, and then Constance went below.

"Can I help you in any way?"

"No, my dear, I have got everything straight."

"Then come up on deck, auntie," for it had been arranged that she should address Annette by that title. "The steward is laying the cloth, and he says we shall have lunch in about half-an-hour."

"Very well, I will come if you wish it, and perhaps it is as well that people should see that you have someone with you, for I don't suppose that after we get outside the Needles I shall be on deck for ever so long."

"It is very pretty," Constance said, when they reached the deck. "It was night each time I came along here before. I wonder what that large building over there is."

"That is Netley Hospital." Philip Clitheroe, in his walk up and down the narrow strip between the deck cabins on one hand and the bulwarks on the other, happened to be passing behind them, and heard and answered the question.

"It is a fine building, is it not? In time of war, it is well suited to its purpose, but in these days of peace it is almost empty." He had stopped in his walk and ranged up beside Madame Duport.

"Ah, then it is a military hospital, I suppose," Annette said, while Constance looked up with an air of somewhat haughty surprise.

"Excuse me," he went on, with a slight smile, in answer to her look, "you are surprised, I see, that I should speak without an introduction, but from the nature of things people cannot be properly introduced to each other on board ship, and if they did not speak without introductions, they would be a silent party indeed throughout the voyage."

"Yes, of course, that is so," Madame Duport said. "The voyage is *triste* enough as it, but to journey for weeks and weeks together without speaking would be terrible. So we are fairly on our voyage, monsieur?"

"Yes, we are fairly off, and I do not suppose that her screw will stop again until we are at Gibraltar."

"Ah, I shall be glad when we are there," Madame Duport said, "the worse will then be over, this terrible voyage across the Bay of Biscay, and when shall we reach Gibraltar?"

"In four or five days, but we shall have it fairly calm with west winds after we have rounded Cape St. Vincent."

"You have been here before, monsieur?"

"Yes, I went up the Mediterranean in a yacht the year before last. Not my own yacht," he added in answer to the quick look he caught from Constance, "no, indeed. It costs a pretty penny to keep up a craft of that size, and I should have come down in the world rapidly indeed if

after cruising in my own yacht on the Mediterranean I had arrived at going out as a second class passenger to Australia in a couple of years."

"There are the stewards going along with dishes, auntie. We may as well go and take off our things. The bell will be ringing directly."

So saying, Constance led Annette to the companion, and they disappeared. Philip Clitheroe mechanically lit his pipe.

"A very good style of a girl," he said to himself, after Constance had disappeared: "a lady every inch of her. I wonder how she comes to be traveling second class. I saw her going to the cabin next to mine with her aunt. She is going out with the idea of being a governess I should think, or perhaps to join a father or brother who has settled out there. I certainly did not expect to meet with that sort of girl in the second class. I thought they would be principally ladies' maids or nurses. Of course, it does not make much difference. Still it is pleasanter having nice people to talk to.

"Well, I am heartily glad I am away. It is an awful business altogether, and it seemed to me I should never feel myself again, but I feel a hundred per cent. better already.

"I fancy my disposition is corky. You can knock me under, but I bob up again. I certainly went under a long way the other day. Well, there is nothing like change for getting things out of one's head. I have got the world before me. I have splendid health and a couple of hundred pounds in my pocket, and I expect I shall enjoy life more when I have got to work or fight for it than I should have done if I had settled down at Corbyn without anything to work for, or any object in life. I feel sure that affair will be settled all right now, it was only done for my sake, and now that it is clear I will have none of it, there is no reason why it should not be put straight, and I hope the little girl will have more pleasure out of Corbyn than I should ever have done.

"There is the luncheon bell aft, I suppose we shall have ours half-an-hour later. It seems rum to be a second class passenger and not to be able to go aft, but after all I do not know if it won't be just as pleasant here. There is one satisfaction, one can always smoke one's pipe here,

while tobacco is strictly forbidden aft. I fancy we shall find that there is a sea on when we get past the Needles, it is blowing pretty hard here ; if so, I shan't see much of my fellow passengers until we get well across the bay. Thank goodness, I don't suffer that way. Oh, there is the Castle, we are slipping along at a quick pace. Last time I came along here I was in Rawlinson's yacht ; it will be some years before I am on board a yacht again. There is our bell, that is a comfort. I feel as hungry as a hunter, though I have no right to do, for I ate a first rate breakfast with Jim this morning ; he is a first-rate fellow that, and has been awfully good to me the last four or five days. I wonder whether he guessed what upset me."

Upon going below, Philip found that there were but seven other passengers. Of these two were, he guessed, ladies' maids going out with passengers aft ; the girl he had spoken to on deck and her aunt made up four. The other three were men, one of these he soon learnt was an engineer going out to Alexandria to take the place upon a steamer there of one who had been invalided home ; the two others were brothers going out to join a cousin, who had a sheep farm in Victoria ; the other four second-class passengers were, he afterwards discovered, nurses, who took their meals with their charges.

For the first minute or two no one spoke. Philip broke the ice.

"I think that we are a very snug little party, and after all, it is a good deal more comfortable having a little table to ourselves like this than to be in that crowded saloon aft."

"A great deal more comfortable I should say," one of the brothers agreed. "Why, they never can get to know each other by the time they arrive out there."

"No. I have always heard that it is much more sociable and pleasant when the ships are not so full. October and November are the most crowded months ; the ship is comparatively empty now. I hope that we are all good sailors, for I fancy we shall get it a little rough when we get outside the island."

The conversation soon became general, and by the time that they had finished their meal, the little party had become acquainted.

"You have got chairs, I hope," Philip said to Madame Duport as they rose. "The company are liberal

enough about most things, but they draw the line at seats. There are not enough aft for one-fifth of the passengers, and forward here there is only the choice of the hen coops on the deck."

"Yes, we have chairs," Constance replied; "a friend who was at the railway station to see us off bought them for us; it seemed to me that we had things enough to look after, and that, although it was very kind of him, I would much rather he had not done it, but perhaps, as you say, they will be useful."

"I can assure you that they will. A chair is more than a luxury, it is an absolute necessity. With a chair you can plant yourself in any snug corner sheltered from the wind, and out of the way of people marching up and down. Without one, you feel quite lost."

Philip's prognostications turned out correct. As soon as the Mandalay had fairly passed the Needles, she felt the force of the wind, and by evening was fighting her way in the teeth of a stiff sou' westerly breeze, which before morning had freshened into half a gale. Philip and the engineer took breakfast alone. Constance came out and carried off two cups of tea.

"You are not suffering, I hope," Philip said.

"No, I hope I shall escape, but my aunt is a bad sailor."

"I should advise you to go up for a blow if it is only for ten minutes; it is very close down here with all the ports shut, but if you do go up you must put on a waterproof, for the spray is flying over her bows."

"Going on deck by yourself?" Annette said. "I think you had better wait until I can come with you, my dear."

"Why, Annette, you may be ill for two or three days, and it will be impossible for me to stay in this cabin all that time. I begin to feel a little headachy now, and I am sure if I stop here I shall soon be ill. I can take care of myself perfectly well."

Madame Duport was too ill to make any further remonstrance, and Constance wrapping herself up in a waterproof made her way on deck. When she got to the top of the companion, she stood holding by the door, for the motion of the vessel seemed to be much greater here than it had been below. The deck was wet, and just as she was looking out, a heavy shower of spray struck the deck house with a noise that made her start. She put her head out and vaguely wondered which would be the best way to go.

"I was expecting you," Philip Clitheroe said quietly, "and I have found a snug corner where you will be in shelter. I think that you had better take my arm, for it is rather difficult at first to keep your footing."

Constance hesitated, but seeing that she must either accept the offer or return to the cabin, she took his arm. Even with that assistance she did not find it easy to get along.

"I had no idea there was so much motion," she gasped, as she clung with both hands to his arm, when a sharp plunge nearly took her off her feet. "I don't think I should have ventured if I had known it."

"She is rather lively. There, this is the place I thought of. You will be sheltered from the wind and spray here, and are out of the way of everything."

It was a little nook between one of the deck houses and the cook's galley. Here Philip placed a camp stool.

"I think you will be comfortable here. This deck house next to you is what we should call on shore the kitchen, and the planks are quite warm to the hands. Now if you will let me wrap this rug round you I think that you will do."

"You are very kind," Constance said as she took her seat.

"Not at all," he replied. "On board a ship everyone does what he can to make other people comfortable. The ordinary rules about things are pretty well laid aside. People who can help, help, while the others receive the help as a matter of course. Now I will stroll off and smoke my pipe. I shall keep a look out, and when you signal that you have had enough of it I shall be happy to help you below again." So saying he moved away, and left her sitting alone. Constance looked after him.

"I was afraid he would have wanted to stop and talk," she said to herself, "and if he had I could not have stayed here five minutes. He does not in the least suspect that I know who he is, and I have no doubt he is laughing to himself now at the thought of how nicely he is taking me in, and how easily it will be for him to get the better of me when we get there. I dare say that even now he is thinking over some plan to send me off three or four days' journey in the wrong direction, and to get this man Morson well out of the way before I return. I am very glad I saw

his face as we were starting ; such a hard, gloomy face as it was. If I hadn't he might have taken me in. He looks now very much as he did at Bath, but not so bright. I suppose this affair has worried him. It can't be exactly pleasant for a man brought up as he has been to have to stoop to fraud and deceit and espionage in order to defraud a girl. He is certainly a wonderful actor. Annette has taken quite a fancy to him, and generally she is a very good judge of character, and as sharp as a needle. It will be very difficult keeping up this pretence of being friendly with him all through this long voyage. He seems determined to make himself agreeable, and there is no doubt he can do so when he likes. He is just what I fancied he would be when I first saw him. It is horrible to know that it is all acting, and that it is the story of the spider and the fly over again, only happily the fly's eyes are open, and it knows all about the web and is not likely to fall into it. However, it is no use worrying myself all the time about it. I had no sleep last night, and now I know him, I have nothing to do but to let him go on playing his game until we get to the end of our voyage, and then trust to my wits to match his. It ought to be easy enough, when the advantages are all on my side. What a splendid sea, what a pity Annette cannot be up enjoying it, too. I see that there are not many passengers about this morning."

Four or five ladies, each attended by one or two gentlemen, were walking up and down on the poop. Nearer to her several men were leaning against the bulwarks smoking, while a few paced up and down the whole length of the ship ; the rest of the passengers were all below. So cosy was her shelter and so much did she enjoy the view of the tossing waves and the novelty of everything around her, that it was nearly two hours before she felt inclined to go below again. She waited until she saw her fellow passenger glance towards her and then held up her hand.

"You have enjoyed it, I hope," Philip said, as he assisted her to her feet, and gave her his arm.

"Immensely, and I am perfectly warm. I am very much indebted to you for finding me such a snug place. I don't know your name, which is awkward."

"You can call me Brown, Sam Brown," he said. "I have already learned from the steward that your name is Miss Renan. Mademoiselle Renan, you speak English wonder-

fully, for a French girl. I notice just a turn of expression here and there that is not quite English, otherwise I should never have dreamt that you were not English. Madame Renan speaks very good English too, but nothing like so well as you do."

"I have had unusual opportunities of learning, and have been accustomed to speak English habitually. Oh!" the exclamation was caused by a sheet of spray which sprang above the side of the vessel and dashed over them just as they reached the door of the companion.

"That was unlucky after escaping so far."

"No harm is done, thanks to the waterproof," she said, and with a nod of the head she went down the companion, leaving Philip on deck.

"How are you, auntie?" she asked, cheerfully, as she entered the cabin.

"I think I'm going to die," said Annette, feebly.

"No, not so bad as that, I hope, Annette; it is unlucky it is so rough just at starting; but you know Mr. Harbur said when you told him what a bad sailor you were that it would only last two or three days. Oh, I wish that you could have been on deck with me, I am sure it would have done you a world of good. It was splendid up there."

Annette was too ill to ask what she had been doing.

"I have been sitting all by myself," the girl went on, "in a warm little corner where I was quite sheltered from the wind, but could see the waves. It was grand, only I wished you could have been sitting there with me, there would have been just room for another camp stool. I mean to make that our special den during the voyage, that is if nobody else takes it. Do you think you could take anything, auntie? A cup of tea or a few spoonfuls of soup. I daresay I can get the steward to get you some."

Annette shook her head. At present she was far beyond wishing for tea or soup.

"I feel very hungry myself," Constance went on. "I only had a biscuit for breakfast. What am I to do?"

"You must have your lunch with the others, my dear; you cannot eat in here. On board a ship people do things that they would not do anywhere else, and I do not see how it is to be helped."

When the bell rang for lunch, Constance was glad to see that one of the other female passengers came out and took her seat at the table.

"You are keeping up well, miss," she said, as she took her seat.

"Yes, I feel perfectly well," Constance replied. "Are you feeling the same?"

"Yes, I am never ill at sea. I have been backwards and forwards to India four times, and I don't mind it at all, only my lady is that fidgety and troublesome one gets no peace. There is not any more the matter with her than there is with me, but she never gets up the first three or four days; she can eat and drink just as heartily as if she was on shore, only she pretends she cannot, and worrits and fancies that she is ill, till she drives me and the stewardess pretty well out of our minds."

"But you did not come to breakfast this morning," Constance said.

"No; I had to stay fussing with her until it was too late, and then I had something with the stewardess aft. I suppose this is your first voyage?"

"Yes, except crossing the Channel from France. I have never been at sea before."

"Well, you are lucky. I don't mind Indian service, for it is easy and comfortable if you do not mind the heat, and you have little enough to do, for the house is full of black servants, but it is trying on the voyage. My lady is so accustomed to be waited on that she can scarcely pick up her handkerchief if she drops it. However, there is one comfort on board a ship—there are no bells. If there were, one would have no peace of one's life. Are you going with us to India?"

"No, we are going to Australia. I believe we go in another steamer from Suez, but I am not sure whether we change there or at Point de Galle."

"At Suez," Philip put in. "That is the worst of this overland route, the change of steamers. However, they say that before long the Canal will be open, and then the steamers will go right out without a change, which will be a great comfort for those who are going then, though it will not help us at present. I was just chatting with one of the mates, and he tells me the glass is rising, and that he thinks this little gale will blow itself out soon."

It does not make much difference to us, fortunately, but after all, it is more pleasant on deck when one can walk about without holding on, and things are drier round one. But for the sake of those who are ill, one is always glad to hear that there is no likelihood of a week of rough weather."

In another two days the sky was bright and clear, and the motion of the ship was now an easy roll on the long regular swell of the Atlantic. Annette was well enough to come on deck for the first time, and the poop was thickly clustered with passengers. Philip Clitheroe had found the two chairs with the name Renan on them among the pile on deck, and had placed them early in the little nook so as to secure possession, and he at once seated them comfortably in them.

"That is Portugal, Mr. Brown?"

"Yes. I believe we passed Lisbon about daybreak this morning. This is a pleasant change in the temperature, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, the air feels quite balmy, it is delightful, isn't it, auntie?"

"I don't think it is quite delightful, Constance, but I dare say I am chilly after being three days in that miserable cabin, but I don't think I shall be able to sit in it very long."

"Will you take my arm and walk up and down for a bit?" Philip said.

"No, thank you, I must wait until the ship gets quite steady before I can do any walking."

After chatting for a few minutes longer, Philip strolled away, and entered into conversation with one of the engineers.

"You have not been sitting here talking to that young man all the while I have been below, Constance?" Madame Duport asked sharply.

"No, auntie, he has never sat down at all. He has just helped me here and seen me fairly seated, and then he goes away until I want him to help me down again."

"That is right, my dear, one cannot be too careful with strangers. You see we don't know who he is, and he does not know who we are, and there is no use getting too intimate with people. In your position you cannot be too careful. You see we hope to have you as mistress of

Corbyn Court before long, and no doubt you will make a grand match then."

"I don't care about being mistress of Corbyn Court, and I am sure I do not wish to make a grand match, Annette," Constance said slowly; "that is one of the very worst things about money. You never know whether people care for you for yourself or for your money. I want to prove that my mother was married; if I can do that, I should be glad to come back to St. Malo, and be just as I was before. I don't want in the very least to go to Corbyn, or to be an heiress. I am quite sure I should be far happier without the money."

"Money is a very good thing, *ma petite*," Madame Duport said, sententiously. "You do not know its advantages yet, but some day you will find it nice to have carriages and maids, and everything else you can wish for."

"I had everything I could wish for at St. Malo, Annette, and I don't want anything better. As to what you were talking about, it is ridiculous to think about it; it will be quite time for you to begin to play the Dragon in another four or five years. I am only a young girl yet."

"Not such a very young girl, Constance. You are seventeen and six months, and though I used to think you were but a child when we were at home, I have come to look upon you as a woman since, and other people would do the same; and who is this Mr. Brown?"

Constance shrugged her shoulders.

"He does not talk about himself, but I believe he is going out to farm, or something of that sort in Australia."

"He has not said anything about his people at home?"

"No, Annette, why should he? I tell you, except at meals, we have had no talk together; what does it matter to us who he is, where he comes from, or what he is going to do?"

Annette shook her head slightly, but made no reply. They were at the beginning of the voyage as yet. She might want to know more about this young man before they got to the end of it.

CHAPTER XV.

CONSTANCE was glad indeed when Annette was able to come up on deck, for hitherto she had felt lonely and strange. At present, except at meal times, she had seen nothing of the other women in the cabin. The engineer scarcely spoke when at table, and at other times was forward, smoking and talking with the sailors, therefore she had been thrown entirely into the company of Philip Clitheroe. Strong as were her feelings against him, she admitted to herself that he had behaved with the greatest consideration for her position. Beyond seeing that she was comfortable when she came on deck, he had abstained altogether from forcing his company upon her, seldom addressing her until she made a move to go below.

"He wishes to inspire me with confidence," she said bitterly, but at any rate he pays me the compliment of showing that he recognizes that I am not the sort of girl who appreciates familiarity. This will be a lesson to me for life, not to trust in appearances. It is not a pleasant lesson, certainly, but it is not one that I am ever likely to forget."

"This is very nice, Annette. I have had nobody to talk to on deck at all since we started, and felt rather a forlorn little being. I told you before we started that I could get on very well by myself, and of course I could have managed somehow, still I am very glad you came."

"Yes, it is not nice, *ma petite*, for girls to travel alone. They can make acquaintances fast enough, but as a rule the acquaintances they make are just those that they would be better without. Men are ready enough to speak to a girl who they see is alone, but women are very slow in doing so."

"Why shouldn't women help each other, Annette?"

"Women are not nice to each other, my dear; it is the way of the world."

Several gentlemen had, in fact, while Constance had been sitting alone, stopped in their walk and asked her if

she was cold, or if they could get her another wrap ; but her "Thank you, I am perfectly comfortable," had been so decided as to discourage any attempts at conversation. Now the two young Byfleets, who had also recovered from their sea sickness, came up and began to chat to Madame Duport and herself ; and after he had smoked a pipe or two, Philip also joined the party, chatting principally with Annette, while a merry conversation went on between the two lads and Constance.

"This has been a pleasant morning," the latter said to Annette, as they went down to lunch. "It has been very dull work for the last three days, but now I think we shall really enjoy the voyage."

"It will be better when it is warmer."

"It will get warmer every hour," Constance said. "Mr. Brown tells me we shall find it downright hot by the time we arrive at Gibraltar. He said we shall be there by to-morrow evening."

They had, indeed, splendid weather all the way to Alexandria. At Gibraltar and Malta the cabin passengers, with the exception of the engineer, went on shore together. Annette suggested that the others should be asked to join the party, as they would otherwise be obliged to remain on board. Both were quiet young women, who had been several years in their mistress' service, and were no drawback to the pleasure of the party on shore.

At Gibraltar they visited the Galleries, walked out to Europa Point, were delighted with the semi-tropical foliage, and with the great hedges of scarlet geraniums and cactus. At Malta they visited the Cathedral, drove out to the old town and saw the mummified monks, made the tour of the fortifications, eat Tangerine oranges and ices, and bought laces and silver filigree jewellery and coral. They had three or four hours to see Alexandria, while the baggage was being landed from the Mandalay, and then twelve hours of dusty travel in the train to Suez. The passage to Point De Galle was delightful ; although the heat in the Red Sea was very oppressive. Then the passengers bound for Calcutta left to go on by the next steamer, as the Agra was bound for Melbourne. This reduced the number of nine second-class passengers to seven, a change which Philip regarded with satisfaction.

Madame Duport was the only one in the forward saloon who had not enjoyed the voyage. When she had assumed

the responsibility of accompanying Constance, she had thought only of saving her from the inconvenience attending travel by an unprotected girl, and the possibility of her falling in love had never occurred to her. She did not know that she was falling in love now, but the fact that she was thrown continually with one whom Annette herself acknowledged to be a very pleasant and gentlemanly young man, certainly rendered the contingency possible. Who he was, Annette had formed no idea. He seldom spoke of his past, beyond mentioning various places in Europe to which he had traveled. Annette's experience was sufficient to assure her that he was a gentleman by birth; his means must be small or he would not be traveling second-class; but his prospects might be good enough for aught she knew to render him a suitable match for Constance if her endeavor to prove herself the heiress of Corbyn Court failed.

But if she succeeded, nothing could be more unfortunate than an affair of this sort. During the last three months, Constance had grown into womanhood, and what but a short time before had been but a promise of beauty was now being verified. With her face, and as the owner of Corbyn Court, she would, Annette knew, make a sensation in society, and it would indeed be terrible were she to lose her to this young fellow going out to fight his way in Australia. Annette was at her wits' end. If she could have found any possible excuse for doing so she would have proposed landing at Ceylon and waiting there for the next steamer for Australia, but no valid excuse for so strange a step presented itself to her. As to warning her, she felt that it was a step likely to be attended with little result. Constance had from a child been accustomed to have her own way in the little household at St. Malo, and was likely to have it now. Still Annette felt that she must say something. It was indeed on the evening of the day they sailed from Ceylon that she spoke when they were in the cabin together.

"Do you know, Constance, I think that it is rather a pity that Mr. Brown did not land with the others to-day."

"Do you," Constance said in surprise. "Why do you want to get rid of him, auntie?"

"Well, dear, I think it would have been better for the young man if he had been going on to Calcutta. You see,

Constance, he is thrown a great deal with you, and there is no doubt that you are very pretty and taking."

"Thank you, Annette, that is quite unexpected," Constance said demurely.

"I don't wish to flatter you, my dear, but there is no doubt that you are so, and it is quite evident that this young man thinks so too. My dear, you should reflect. It would be of all misfortunes the greatest for you to fall in love with a young man who is a nobody, of whom we know nothing except that he is a second-class passenger going to Australia."

"And you think I am falling in love with him, auntie?"

"I don't know, my dear. Sometimes I think that you are, although you do not know it yourself. You talk with him and laugh with him as if you had known him for years. I have watched you closely, as is my duty, and sometimes I feel sure that you like him. Sometimes I notice an expression in your face that I do not understand, and it seems to me that your voice is hard and your laugh unnatural, and I hardly recognize you. It troubles me sorely."

"Do not let it trouble you, auntie. I have no more idea of marrying Mr. Sam Brown than I have of marrying you. If he were the only man in the world I would not take him."

There was a strength and earnestness in the tones which assured Annette of their truth, but her surprise for the moment exceeded her relief. She herself had from the first taken a strong liking to this young man, and it seemed to her that with his pleasant manner, his hearty laugh, his frank, honest expression, and his fine figure he was just the sort of man to win a girl's love. This very decided expression of opinion, therefore, with regard to him took her completely by surprise.

"I am very glad that it is so, Constance, very glad to see that you are so sage and prudent; but you surprise me. Had this young man been wealthy and of good family I own that I should have nothing to say against him, for he seems to me to be one that anyone might like. You are not a coquette, Constance, you have never been at all like that. Why, then, since you dislike this young man so much as all that, have you been so pleasant with him? I do not say you have encouraged him, I would not even

think such a thing, but surely you must have seen what his hopes have been. Of course we know that it is absurd, and that Miss Corbyn cannot marry a young fellow who has probably run through a fortune and is being helped out by his friends to Australia to begin afresh there. But he knows nothing of this, and guesses perhaps that you are going out to teach French or music in Australia. I think he will have a little, just a little cause to reproach you."

"I think not, auntie," Constance said, with a smile that puzzled Madame Duport. "I do not think that he will complain."

"Well, my dear, you know best; but it does not seem to me like you to act in a way that people might think was heartless, and to give pain to anyone. I do not understand you."

"You will understand some day, aunt. I think Mr. Sam Brown and I both know what we are doing."

Constance would have been blind indeed had she not noticed the increasing devotion of her fellow passenger. She had indeed marked, almost before he was conscious of it himself, how from the time Annette had appeared upon deck his attentions had gone on increasing, until he was seldom absent from her side, and she had not been long in arriving at a conclusion regarding his intentions.

It was curious that in her talk Constance had never mentioned her destination. He had assumed that she was going out as a governess, but from the first the unpleasant idea that she might possibly be going out to be married had sometimes occurred to him. It was certainly more probable that an aunt would come out to escort a niece bound on such an errand, and to see her comfortably settled in her new home, than that she would make this long journey only to chaperon her were she going into a family as a governess. He had over and over again resolved to find out by a direct question the object of her voyage, but had never been able to muster up sufficient courage.

One day, soon after leaving Malta, Constance took the rôle of questioner. She was sitting working by the side of Madame Duport. Philip had been talking about Australia, and Constance looked up very quietly and said,

"But what are your views, Mr. Brown? You said the other day that you had no friends out there. What do you intend to do—to take a farm?"

"Well, not at first," he said. "I shall knock about a bit and see what sort of openings there are, and learn something of colonial life before I make up my mind as to what it is best to settle down to. When I get to Melbourne I am going on to Sydney in the first place."

"Are you?" the girl said, with sudden interest. "Do you think New South Wales is a better colony than Victoria or Queensland?"

"I don't know that. I have not thought much about it, Miss Renan. I have some business to do there; after that I shall be free to look about me."

"We are bound for Sydney, too," Annette said quietly.

"I am glad indeed to hear that," he said in a tone of such lively satisfaction that Constance looked up in admiration at his acting. "That will be pleasant indeed. I had no idea that I should have the pleasure of your company beyond Melbourne. You are going to stay in the town I suppose?"

"Our plans are not yet finally settled," Madame Dupont said quietly, and Philip saw that he could not pursue the subject further.

When they were a week out from Ceylon he spoke. It was a lovely moonlight night. They were standing at the bulwark together, while Annette was half dozing in her deck chair, within sight but out of hearing. He had not meant to speak until the voyage was nearly over, but the soft beauty of the evening and the hope he entertained that she was not indifferent to him prompted him to act upon the moment.

"I have not a great deal to offer you beside my love, Miss Renan, but at least I can promise you that you shall never feel the anxieties of life. I have property in England from which I can anyhow draw an income sufficient to live upon in comfort, if my own efforts to cut out a path for myself should fail. At any rate I can offer you a deep and honest love. You know nothing of my past, or why I left England. That I must for the present ask you to take on trust, and I think that you must know enough of me to feel sure that whatever is the reason of my leaving England, nothing disgraceful on my part is the cause of it."

Constance stood immovable while he was speaking to her. She had not attempted to draw away the hand he had taken when he began, she had not looked round towards him, but had stood gazing over the sea. Now she drew her hand away suddenly and faced him.

"Are you sure that it is an honest love you offer me? Are you quite certain that your conduct has been that of a true gentleman—that there is no disgraceful action in the past?"

Her voice was clear and hard, and Philip Clitheroe stepped back as if he had been suddenly struck.

"What do you mean? Good heavens, Miss Renan, what do you mean?"

"Do you call it the conduct of a gentleman to play a double part, and fight against a woman with secret weapons; and to have her every movement dogged by spies, and while protesting that you meant her well, to work against her in the dark? Was it a gentleman's part to try to destroy the one proof which would have put her in your place by mutilating a register in a church and stealing her proof? Was it honorable and honest, when you learnt from your spies that she was going out, to search for the one living witness to her mother's marriage, that you should take a false name, and go out in the same ship with her so as to forestall her in her search? Was it a gentleman's part to try to win her love, so that if you did not succeed in gaining all you might at least share it with her? I thank God, Mr. Clitheroe, that I had seen you before, and recognized you at once when I saw you on board, and that I knew you for what you are and not what you seem to be, and that I knew that your pleasant face and your assumed frankness were but a mask which hid one of the meanest villains on earth."

Philip Clitheroe stood as one bewildered when Constance first began to pour out her accusations against him. She had spoken at first in a hard, cold tone, but her voice rose and the words came faster as she went on, and there was a ring of passion and pain in them as she closed the indictment.

"My God!" he said, in low, husky tones when she had finished; "and this is what you have thought of me all along."

"I did not think, I knew," she cried. "You are a fine actor, Mr. Clitheroe," she went on, bitterly, "and I tender

you my compliments. If I had not been forewarned, if I had not known you all along, you would have deceived me, and when I some day learned the truth I should have been one of the most miserable women on earth. You thought that while you knew me I took you for the Mr. Sam Brown you pretended to be—the young man going to fight his way in Australia. Happily I had seen you at Bath, and my part has been a comparatively easy one to play ; but I was getting very tired of it, and am glad it has come to an end."

"And you are Constance Corbyn," Philip Clitheroe said in a low, dazed tone.

"Don't carry it on any longer, Mr. Clitheroe," Constance said, contemptuously. "The first part of the game is over, and you have lost so far. You think that there is another game yet to be played in Australia, and that you will beat me there. Perhaps you may, the odds are hardly fair—a man against a girl ; but I have shown myself no contemptible opponent so far, so do not make too sure of success in the end. Now, Mr. Clitheroe, I will wish you good-night."

The bitterness of the girl's tone stung Philip Clitheroe from his bewilderment, and he grasped her arm suddenly as she turned to leave him.

"One moment, Miss Corbyn," he said. "You have had your say, I have a right to mine. A man whom you have charged with being a mean villain—with having set spies upon a woman—with having committed a felony to deprive her of her rights—with having feigned a love for her to save his estates—has at least the right of reply. You will not believe me ; but I deny every accusation that you have brought against me. As to your last accusation, that when I pretended love for Miss Renan I knew that she was Constance Corbyn, I swear to you that it is false, that I did not know that Constance Corbyn was on board this ship ; that had I known that you were here I would have shunned you as the pest ; for from reasons known to myself, of all women in the world, Constance Corbyn is the last I would marry. I do not expect you to believe all this. I don't know why you should ; knowing only what you know it is natural you should think as you do. May I return you the compliment you paid me on my acting ? You are magnificent, Miss Corbyn. You have won hands down.

The happiness of my life has been the stake, and I have lost. I felicitate you on your triumph."

He loosed his hold of her arm and walked aft. Constance stood looking after him, as if turned to stone. Then she suddenly caught at the rail, and stood panting and catching her breath in short gasps. As yet she could not think, only she seemed to hear over and over again, keeping time with the beat of the engine through the skylight close behind her, the words, "I swear to you that it is false," "I swear to you that it is false."

At last she turned, and with difficulty staggered to her chair by the side of that of Madame Duport, and almost fell sideways into it.

"Dear! how you startled me," Annette said. "I do believe I was asleep. I think it is time to go below."

Constance did not answer. Madame Duport put her hand on the girl's arm and drew it towards her. There was no responsive movement, and there was something in the way the arm dropped as she released it that so startled Annette that she leapt to her feet and stooped over Constance.

"What is it, my dear; is anything the matter?" There was no reply, and the moonlight shewed that the girl's eyes were closed and her face deadly pale.

"Mon Dieu! the child has fainted!" Annette exclaimed. "What can it be?"

Annette, in the course of her service, had seen fainting women before, and was equal to the emergency. She went across to two gentlemen who were smoking and talking some little distance forward.

"Pardon me," she said, "but my niece is suddenly taken ill and has fainted, I think. Would you kindly lend your aid to help her below. It is nothing, and she will soon recover. Perhaps it is the moon and the night air, but she will be best in her cabin where I can attend upon her."

Constance was at once lifted and carried below, and Annette and the stewardess then took her into her cabin and laid her in her berth.

"Poor young lady," the stewardess said, compassionately, as she assisted Annette to loose the girl's clothing and sprinkle water on her face; "and she seemed so well and strong too."

"Doubtless it is the moon and the night air," Annette said, "and it has been hot and close to-day. It will pass off, doubtless, and she will be herself again to-morrow. Girls are subject to these things. Thank you, her eyelids are moving and she will soon recover. It is better that she should find no one here but myself. If she sees anyone else it might startle her, and it is better that for to-night she should not know that she has fainted."

"Perhaps it would be best," the stewardess said. "I will make her a nice cup of tea and bring it to the door in a few minutes ; that will do her good when she begins to come round."

"It is all right, my dear," Annette said, soothingly. "You have not been quite well. They say it is bad to stay too long out in the moon, and it is close and hot to-night. But you will be well again after a little rest, and the stewardess is making you a cup of tea."

For a minute or two Constance did not reply, then Annette saw a flash of recollection come into her eyes, and she gave a little wailing cry, and turned her face towards the side of the bunk.

"What is it, my child ; has anything happened to you ?" Annette asked, anxiously.

"Please leave me alone. I will tell you to-morrow," she said, faintly.

She shook her head when the tea came, but drank a little, evidently rather to get rid of Annette and to be quiet than because she wanted it.

"Shall I take off your things, dear ?"

"No ; I only want to be quiet."

Annette threw a light shawl over her, and then, partly undressing, lay down in her own berth.

What could have happened to Constance that her illness had not arisen from the causes she had assigned to the stewardess ? She was certain the sudden start and the look of distress when she began to recover showed that it was a shock of some kind that had brought on the fainting. Annette knew that just before she had herself dozed off, Constance was standing talking with Mr. Brown. No doubt what she had foreseen had taken place, he had told Constance he loved her, and she, of course, had refused him. There could be no doubt about that after what she had said the evening they had left Point De Galle, but in that

case, why should she be upset? She had herself warned Constance that the young fellow would have a right to say that she had encouraged him. No doubt he had done so, and perhaps with force and bitterness. Still even that would hardly account for Constance being upset to this extent.

The girl's conduct had indeed been a puzzle to her throughout the voyage. She had certainly accepted the attentions of their fellow passenger with a readiness altogether at variance with her character. Then to Annette, who knew every turn and inflection of her voice, she had never seemed to be herself. Her laughter was forced, and there was an undercurrent of bitterness and sarcasm so wholly unlike her that Annette had wondered, but in vain, what had come over the child. If she had meant all along to refuse this young man, why had she not shown him so from the moment his attentions became marked? From a child Constance had been strong in her likes and her dislikes, and had been equally frank in showing them. The whole thing was a puzzle, and it was some time before Madame Duport went off to sleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

Nor until daylight broke did Constance Corbyn close an eye. She had been looking forward to her triumph, to the discomfiture of her enemy, to overwhelming him with scorn and contempt. Everything succeeded according to her expectations ; she had taken him completely by surprise, one by one she had formulated her charges, and had told him that she regarded him as the meanest villain on earth. What had been the result? He had told her that her charges were false, false from first to last. He had denied that he was aware of her identity, or that he even knew she was on board. He had declared, too, that Constance Corbyn was the last woman in the world he would marry.

Could all this be true, or was it but a piece of acting in keeping with all she previously thought of him? She tried to persuade herself that it was so, but failed altogether. As he had spoken, an absolute conviction had seized her that he was speaking the truth, and that there had been some terrible mistake. "The happiness of my life has been at stake, and I have lost." Surely he could not have been lying, for taken by surprise as he must have been, accused of treachery, of a crime, of deceit and baseness—and this at a moment when he must have expected a favorable reply to the words of love he had spoken—was it possible he could have rallied so soon, and while congratulating her upon her victory, have crushed her beneath a feeling that she had committed a terrible error, an error which involved her happiness as well as his.

Then her thoughts turned to the words, had he known that Constance Corbyn was on board the ship, he would have shunned her as the pest ; she was the last of all women in the world he would marry.

"What does he mean? what can he mean?" she repeated to herself scores of times. "What have I done that he should speak so of me? Does he think me so unmaidenly for thus coming forward to struggle for my rights, for thus striving to clear the memory of my dead mother?" And thus the long hours of the night passed, until exhaustion at last closed her eyes.

She did not wake until nearly noon. Annette was sitting beside her, working, with a look of grave concern in her face. The events of the past evening came in a rush upon the girl.

"What is it, *ma petite*? what has happened? tell your old nurse."

Constance held out her arms. Annette threw herself on her knees beside the berth and took her in her arms, and as the girl burst into a passion of tears, soothed and caressed her, as she had done in the troubles of her childhood.

"Tell me all about it, dear," she said at last, as the sobs gradually ceased. "It is about Mr. Brown, that goes without saying. Tell me all, Constance; you know I am never hard with you. Have you made a mistake, have you found out that you deceived yourself when you said that you did not care for him?"

"I will tell you, Annette. You must know that I found out the first hour after we came on board that this Mr. Brown was Philip Clitheroe."

"Are you losing your senses, *ma petite*?" Annette exclaimed, in more anxiety than surprise.

"I did not tell you," Constance went on, without heeding the interruption, "because I knew that you would not approve of my plan, that you would keep him at a distance, and that he would soon see that we knew him." Then she went on to tell all particulars, how she knew him by sight, how she had played her part throughout, and how, when Philip Clitheroe had told her of his love, she had poured out her indignation and scorn upon him.

"And you did rightly," Annette said, earnestly. "I see not that you have anything to reproach yourself with. This coquin deserved all that you said to him. I would have said as much and more had I known who he was."

"Yes, Annette, but I was wrong all the time. He did not know me, he had no idea that Miss Corbyn was on board."

"Hah!" Annette said, with disdain, "you believe that story? I thought you wiser, child. Of course a knave will lie when he is found out."

"I will tell you what he said, nurse, and you shall judge for yourself," and she repeated without the change of a word what Philip Clitheroe had said, for every word seemed burnt into her brain.

"Well, we shall see, child," Annette said, "but do not fret over it. The matter will come right in time, these things always come right in time, and you see he acknowledged that it was natural you should have thought as you did. He will see that you are not to blame in the matter, and will have no harsh feelings towards you. If what he says is true he may be a worthy and honorable gentleman."

Constance shook her head. "If I have wronged him I have wronged him beyond forgiveness," she said. "I have fooled him and led him on and then spurned him. I have called him a traitor, a thief, and a mean villain. Let us say no more about it, it is done, and it is irremediable."

Annette was too wise to attempt to argue, but she had her own opinions. She had in the course of her life seen many quarrels between young men and young women, and that if they cared for each other the quarrels were generally made up in the end. That Philip Clitheroe did care for Constance she had been convinced after the first week of their voyage. As to the girl's feelings she had been altogether at fault, but she thought it probable that whatever Constance might have previously thought of him, her strong conviction that she had treated him with cruel injustice would tell immensely in his favor. Annette had been too wise a woman ever to hint to Constance that she thought the possession of the Corbyn estates could be far better settled by an arrangement between the claimants than in a law court; but the idea had often occurred to her, and it now seemed to her more than ever that this would be the satisfactory conclusion of the affair.

Constance did not leave her cabin until the evening, but she insisted upon Annette going up on deck for a time to enjoy the fresh air.

A few minutes after she had taken her seat Philip Clitheroe came up, and lifting his hat, as usual, said, "May I say a word to you, madame?" and then sat down in the chair beside her.

"You will have heard what happened between me and Miss Corbyn last night," he went on. "I do not wish to discuss it, and I speak at present merely for her sake. You know how people gossip on board a steamer. It has doubtless been noticed and commented upon that I have been a good deal in company with you and her. If it is observed that we no longer speak, it will be coupled with

her sudden illness yesterday evening, and will be made the subject of talk and conjecture. Had it not been for her illness I should have naturally abstained from addressing you or her. People would have said that I had proposed and had been rejected, and that I had taken it to heart and was sulking. That would not have mattered at all, but her illness might give rise to other conjectures, and blame might fall upon her. Therefore, I propose, with your permission and her's, that for the short time we shall remain on board together, our intercourse should not be entirely broken off, and that at least I should render to you the ordinary civilities of a gentleman to two ladies of his acquaintance. Have I your permission to do this?"

"Certainly, monsieur, and I thank you," Madame Dupont said. "Constance looks very ill, and it will seem natural that she should not wish to talk as before. What you propose will save her from painful comment, and I thank you."

Philip sat talking for a few minutes in a cold and constrained voice upon different subjects, and then left her, and a few minutes later Annette got up and again went down to the cabin. Constance shivered when she heard the arrangement that had been made.

"I do not like it, Annette. I do not care what people might think and say. Anything would be better than having to speak to him."

"It is for the best, my dear," Annette said, decidedly. "You must not be talked about; anything is better than that. It is not for long, and you will have but little to say to him. You look so ill, it will be easily understood that you need quiet and rest, and are unfit for conversation. It is in all respects the best, and whatever be the truth as to this strange affair, Mr. Clitheroe is behaving like a thoughtful gentleman in his proposal."

When Constance came up in the evening with Annette Philip Clitheroe met them as usual at the top of the companion, took the shawls Annette had brought up, walked beside them to their chairs and seated them there, and as other passengers came up to inquire how Constance felt, gravely expressed his hope that she was better. Annette answered for her.

"My niece is better, but, as you may see, she is still weak and unfit to talk. I fear she will be some time before she is herself again."

The wan face of the girl spoke for itself. Even in the twilight the pallor of her face and the dark rings round her eyes were unmistakable signs of the truth of what Annette said. She was evidently absolutely unfit for conversation, and the change that the twenty-four hours had made in her appearance was so startling that the voices were hushed, and all drew off silently, leaving Annette and Constance to themselves. In half-an-hour Philip returned.

"I think, Madame Renan, that we are going to have a change of weather," he said, quietly. "There is a dullness about the sky, and you see there are no stars visible, and the moon is rising red and dull. We have been very fortunate so far, but I think that we are likely to have a storm before long. There is an oily look on the water, and I heard the first mate tell the chief engineer just now that the glass was falling rapidly."

"Oh, I hope we shall not have a storm," Annette said. "I hate storms. I think we will go below now; will you please give my niece your arm."

Constance uttered a little exclamation of objection, but Philip paid no attention to it. He gravely held out his hand to help her to her feet.

Constance felt so weak that she was forced to avail herself of his arm. Annette collected the shawls hastily, and moved after them. "Thank you," she said, when she reached the top of the companion. "I will help my niece down. Will you kindly bring the shawls?"

He left them at the door of the cabin.

"I will not go up any more," Constance said, as she threw herself down on her berth. "I will not leave the cabin again until we reach Melbourne."

The weather had changed still farther before morning; the wind had got up, although it could not as yet be said to be blowing hard, and the sea had begun to rise and the air was thick and hazy.

"What do you think of it?" Philip Clitheroe asked the second officer, who had come off duty at eight bells.

"Don't quite know what to think of it," he replied. "The glass has been going down since yesterday, but slowly, not like the sudden drop that generally is before bad weather in these seas. No doubt we are going to have some wind, how much I cannot say, but I don't think it will be anything of a gale. It is a queer looking sky too,

for these parts. One expects thick weather in the Atlantic, but one doesn't often get it here, and it is getting thicker too."

During the day the wind increased steadily, and was blowing half a gale by nightfall. The weather was still thick, but was patchy, at times clearing up so that the sky could be seen overhead, while five minutes afterwards clouds of vapor seemed to sweep down and they could scarce see a ship's length around them. To the passengers the change was not an unpleasant one after the long spell of fine weather and cloudless skies they had been having. The motion of the vessel was not too great to prevent walking on deck, and the question whether the wind would increase to a gale afforded a topic of conversation and argument very welcome in the monotony of a sea voyage.

Constance Corbyn had not left her cabin all day. Madame Duport came out at meal times and reported that her niece did not seem to be able to shake off the effects of her fainting fit. She had a headache, and the ship's doctor, who had seen her that morning, had said that she had best keep quiet for a day or two. No doubt she felt the heat and was low and nervous. In a few days they would get cooler weather, which would set her up again. There was nothing to be at all uneasy about.

If not uneasy, Philip Clitheroe had been worried and uncomfortable during the forty-eight hours that had elapsed since he had spoken to Constance. The first night he had not gone below, as sleep was out of the question, and putting on an ulster to keep out the heavy night dews, he passed the hours alternately pacing up and down the deck and leaning against the bulwark rail gazing out over the sea.

He had had a terrible blow, a blow at once to his love and to his self-respect; and his indignation was at first almost greater than his disappointment. He was conscious that he had done all that an honorable man could do. It was horrible to have been suspected of such things as those of which Constance had accused him, and which were all the harder to bear inasmuch as the words had not been spoken in an outburst of anger, but with a bitter sarcasm that had cut like a knife. But that he should have been so accused gave him but comparatively little concern. The wound that had first smarted the most was the thought that while he had hoped and thought that his love for this girl

was returned, she had all the time been playing with him, that she had led him on to speak simply that she might avenge the wrong she thought he had done her by thus unmasking him. He felt the pain of this more keenly at first than that of the disappointment of his hopes, and for a time was more angry than grieved; but during the long hours of the night watch his anger died out.

Thinking it all over as he had heard the story from James Ferris, he saw it was perfectly natural that when she saw him come on board under an assumed name, she should have suspected that he it was who had been striving to prevent her from obtaining the proofs she sought. He was alone interested in doing so; he had been present with Ferris when her letters to her father were found; and she might well think that he had come upon some other document which had convinced him that her claim was a just one, and had at the same time given him such particulars as to the marriage and its witnesses as enabled him at once to take steps to thwart her.

Whom else could she suspect? James Ferris, who knew all the circumstances, admitted that he was altogether puzzled, and this girl, who did not know him, could only suspect that it was his work. When therefore she saw him on board, she could not but conclude that his object was either to forestall her in her search in Australia, as she believed he had done in that at home, or to protect himself by securing her hand. In that case the course she had taken was a natural one, and she had led him on to discover his object only to humiliate and shame him by telling him he had been acting a part all along and how base a thing he was.

She was not to be blamed. Here was she, without a friend in the world, save this good old nurse of hers, coming alone and unaided to England to prove what she believed to be her rights, and finding herself met with the foulest manœuvres, her footsteps dogged, the precious register, which would have cleared her mother's name and proved her rights, foully abstracted; what thought could she entertain of him whom she had good reason to believe her secret enemy but hatred and contempt? It must have been hard for her to play her part so well, when at heart she must have loathed him.

Her sudden breakdown when it was over showed how great the strain had been. Well, she would know in time

that she had been mistaken. When she got the letter from Ferris, who would he supposed send it through his friend Harbut, she would see that he could not have been acting as she had accused him of doing. Not that it would make any difference to him; he should never see her again, for if the crime of which she had charged him was not his, it was his mother's, done for his sake, and would stand like a wall between them—a barrier that nothing could overcome. What a fatality that he should have embarked in the same ship! How did it come about?

Then he thought over his conversation with Ferris, and remembered that when he had said that he had not made up his mind whether to go to the Colonies or the United States, Ferris had at once suggested Australia, and said that a steamer would sail in a couple of days, and that he himself had adopted the idea because the search for Morrison would give him an object on first landing. Yes; it was entirely Jim's doing, and now he thought of it, it was likely—nay, it was almost certain—that he must at the time have known that his cousin would be on board that ship, and that they would come together. Ferris could not have known that Constance knew him by sight, and could but have had one object in thus throwing them together.

He had told him what a charming girl this cousin of his was, and might well have thought that he would fall in love with her, and that a pleasant solution of the difficulty might be arrived at. Jim knew nothing of this other terrible business, and such an ending to the affair would have seemed to him the most desirable that could be arrived at.

"As far as I was concerned, his idea—for I have no doubt that it was his idea—turned out a correct one; but instead of bringing me, as he expected, safe into port, it has been the finishing blow to me. I should have forgot the other business in time; in fact, I seemed to have done so already. Thinking I had set matters right before I sailed, and that Constance would be at once placed in possession of the Court, and that the injury could thus be atoned for, I had put it aside and thought of nothing else but this girl. I suppose I shall get over this too in time, but it is hard to think that she will always despise me. She will know when she gets Jim's letter that I had no thought of keeping her out of her rights, but she will always think I came on board this ship with the intention of mak-

ing love to her before she knew that her claim to Corbyn Court was acknowledged. I denied it to her yesterday, but she will never believe my denial, and my statement that Constance Corbyn was the last woman in the world I would marry will seem to her a pitiable lie, coined to meet the occasion, for she will never know that my mother's crime stands between us."

Philip was not surprised when next day Constance did not leave her cabin. "She doesn't mean to see me again," he said. "I could feel how she shrank from me last night, how her hand trembled with indignation when she put it on my arm. I dare say she is really unwell; it has been enough to make her, poor child. It must be an awful time for her, thinking that I was playing a part all the time, and smiling and being pleasant, and hiding her knowledge and fooling me to the top of my bent, while she loathed me like poison. I am a most unfortunate beggar, there is no doubt. Well, I will have one more pipe and turn in," he said, as he paced the deck restlessly late that evening. "It is of no use thinking and worrying any more. I did not sleep many hours last night, and none at all the night before, so I hope I shall go off to-night as soon as I turn in. It is no use crying over spilt milk, and I have got health and strength and means to give me a new start and a reserve to fall back upon if I fail. I have made a mull of it so far, and I have got to set my teeth hard and begin afresh. There is no going back to Clitheroe now with her at Corbyn Castle, so I have got to make up my mind to build up a new home in Australia and stick to it. I shall be better off than men who can never get over their hankering to be in the old country again. Hello! What's that?"

There was a shout from the look out on the bow of "Ship a-head," followed instantaneously by the order from the officer on the bridge, "Hard a-port, hard a-port for your life," and the sharp ring of the engine bell.

In a moment Philip sprang up on to the forecastle and looked ahead. Looming through the mist, about a cable's length away, was a ship in the act of crossing the steamer's bows, and he saw at once that a collision was inevitable. It was too late for the rudder to affect the steamer's course, and she must strike the vessel somewhere amidships.

Another ten seconds and the crash would come, and to avoid the wreck of falling spars Philip sprang down from

the fo'castle again, as did the man on the look-out. He ran a few yards and then grasped the rails to steady himself for the shock. He had scarcely done so when there was a terrible crash. The great steamer shook from stem to stern, there was a sound of crashing timber and falling spars, and then a momentary silence, for the screw had ceased to revolve the moment the blow was given; shouts and screams then rose under her bow, while a confusion of noises broke out on board the steamer. The sailors poured out from the fo'castle just as they had sprung from their berths, the watch came running forward, and screams were heard from below.

Then came a stern shout from the officer on the bridge: "Silence below there. All hands to your stations at the boats; see that they are ready to be cleared away and lowered at once. We shall have to save those on board the ship we have run into. Quartermaster, go to the bow and see, if you can, whether we have sustained any damage."

There was a moment's pause, and then came the order: "Lower down the two lifeboats. Steady, my lads, but as quick as you can; she is going. Ah, good heavens, she has gone!"

It was but half a minute since the collision had taken place, but the captain and other officers had already appeared on deck, having only stopped, as they leapt from their berths, to pull on their trousers.

"Mr. Thompson, do you take command of the port lifeboat; do you take command of the starboard boat, Mr. Green," the captain ordered. "Do you say that she has gone down, Mr. Hawkins?"

"Yes, sir; she had but just cleared us when she went down; we must have cut her nearly in half. We did not catch sight of her through the mist until we were our own length off. I stopped the engines at once and ordered 'Hard astern,' but our way could scarcely have been checked when we struck her."

"What was she?"

"She was a barque, sir, of seven or eight hundred tons I should say."

"Are we much damaged?"

"I cannot say, sir; I have sent the quartermaster forward to examine her."

"I will go and have a look for myself," the captain said.

Just at this moment the quartermaster hailed the officer on watch: "Her stem is badly bent, sir, and some of the plates have started."

"I will take the command, Mr. Hawkins; do you get a gang at once, and open the fore hatchway and see if the collision bulkhead is all right. Take the carpenter down with you and get some spars and see that it is wedged up and strengthened as much as you can. Quartermaster, send and get some blue lights and light up so that the boats can keep us in sight. Any of the stewards there?"

"Yes, sir," several voices exclaimed.

"Well, just go below and tell the passengers that there is no immediate danger. I hope no danger at all. Tell them to dress themselves, and if possible to stop that screaming and hubbub."

Taking a blue light from the quartermaster's hand as soon as he came up, the captain lit it and went to the bow, and holding it over his head leant over the rail to examine the injury. "Boatswain," he shouted as he handed the blue light to the quartermaster, "get a sail up at once. We must stretch it over the bows. There is no stopping the leak, but it may ease the pressure on the bulkhead."

"Now, gentlemen," he said as he went aft and met several of the male passengers who had hurried up half-dressed, "I must trouble you all either to go below or to keep well aft. You will only be in the way forward and can be of no assistance. Tell every one to dress quietly in warm clothes and to gather any valuables they may have in a small bundle. There is no immediate danger, but there is nothing like everyone being prepared."

The passengers retired aft and Philip descended to the second-class cabin. The other male passengers had run up on deck, the two ladies' maids had gone aft to the main saloon. Philip went to Madame Duport's cabin and knocked.

"Are you dressed, madame?" he asked.

The door opened and Annette came out wrapped up in shawls.

"What is the matter, Mr. Clitheroe?" Annette asked.

"We felt a terrible shock, but have heard nothing since, but from the running about on deck, we are sure something has happened. The steward came and said something, but there was such a noise of shouting and screaming from

some of the passengers that we could not hear what it was."

"We have been in collision with a large ship and have, I am sorry to say, sunk her. Two of the boats are away trying to pick up some of her crew. We have stove in our bows, but it is hoped that the bulkhead will hold. But it is well to take all precautions. There is no occasion for haste, but I should advise you to dress comfortably in the clothes which would be most suitable for a long voyage in a boat. Each take a small bundle or bag with such things as are most absolutely requisite, and should we be obliged to take to the boats, which I sincerely trust will not be the case, put on as many shawls and cloaks as you can; you will find them very useful. You can do all this quietly and without haste. I will come down from time to time to let you know how things are going on."

"Thank you," Annette said, quietly; "we will take your advice, Mr. Clitheroe."

The young man hesitated for a moment as if he wanted to say more, then turned and went to his own cabin. He opened his portmanteau, put on a flannel shirt instead of that he was wearing, placed a pocket-book with some letters and papers in his pocket, put on a pea-jacket over his velvet coat, and strapped up a bundle of rugs.

"Let me see, is there anything else that I may want? Ah, yes; this may be most useful of all," and he took out a revolver from the portmanteau, dropped it into one pocket and a box of cartridges into another. He chose a long clasp knife from the articles he had been persuaded to buy at the outfitter's, and a large flask which he had had filled with brandy. He took off his coats and slung this by its strap over his shoulder, and then put on his coats again. "That may be a last resource," he muttered, "and I had best keep it hidden. That is about all, I think. Oh, I will add those two waterproof cloaks to the bundle; all the rest must go." Having thus made his preparations, he went up on deck just as he heard the engines again in rotation. The boats had returned, and the crews were hoisting them up to the davits.

"Have you found anyone?" he asked one of the men.

"Not a sign of one. We found some pieces of wreckage, but not a soul."

Philip was not surprised. The catastrophe had been so sudden that no one below would have time to get up on

deck, and those on the watch had doubtless been carried down with the sinking ship.

The steamer was rolling heavily in the trough of the waves. Looking over the side he saw by the white foam that the engines were reversed and the vessel going astern. A great spout of water was pouring from her side.

"They are using the circulating pumps to keep down the water," he said to himself. "I am afraid there is no doubt that the bulkhead has given way to some extent. It is a bad look-out, especially in such weather as I am afraid we are going to have."

Presently one of the engineers, with whom he had often chatted, came on deck.

"So you have set the main engine to pump, I see."

"Yes, she is taking in water fast through that bulkhead, or else, as is more likely, after such a smash some of the plates have opened aft of it. It is nearly up to the stoke-hole gratings already. I am afraid it is all up with the Aden. Fortunately we are not a very full ship, and the boats will carry us well enough. See, they are making preparations already."

As he spoke some of the stewards came along carrying cases and barrels, which they placed in the boat abreast of where they were standing. The second officer came hurrying along.

"Can I be of any use?" Philip asked.

"Yes, the captain has just called for volunteers to help to get up stores."

Philip ran down below and again knocked at Madame Duport's cabin.

"I don't wish to alarm you," he said, as Madame Duport and Constance both came to the door, "there is no immediate danger whatever, but the water is coming in, and I fear that we shall certainly have to take to the boats, though I hope not for some hours. I am now going to help to get up provisions, so may not be able to come again for some little time. There is sure to be ample warning before we take to the boats. Would you not rather go aft to the saloon, you will find all the other ladies there."

"I think we would rather stay where we are," Madame Duport said. "What do you say, Constance?"

"Yes, I think we may as well remain here," Constance agreed. "We are as safe in one place as in another. Mr.

Clitheroe," she said, moving past Annette, "I may not get an opportunity of speaking to you again, we may not be in the same boat, we may neither of us ever reach land. I wish to tell you that I believe all that you said to me the other evening, that I am sure you have acted as an honorable gentleman, and I regret—oh! so deeply—that I should have thought you otherwise. Can you forgive what I said to you? Remember," she went on pleadingly, as he was silent for a moment, "that I am but a girl, that I may be soon going to face death, and that it will be so hard to die knowing that I have so cruelly wronged you."

"I forgive you heartily and wholly, Cousin Constance," he said, taking both her hands, "if there be anything to forgive. You have been cruelly wronged, and though—as God hears me—it was not I who wronged you, it was natural you should have thought so, and that thinking so you should have spoken as you did. I have not blamed you for a moment, for in your place I should have acted precisely as you did. God bless you, little cousin. I trust that there are happy days in store for you yet;" and stooping down he kissed the girl's forehead, and then, dropping her hands, hurried off, and was soon engaged with a number of other passengers in carrying up stores and in placing them in boats, under the directions of the second officer, the other officers being at work forward with the crew, endeavoring by means of piled up bedding and blankets to stop the inrush of the water.

It took some hours' hard work to get all the cases and boxes required sorted out from the mass below, taken up on deck and stowed away in the boats; and the morning was breaking before the work was completed. Hot coffee, grog and biscuits were handed round when the work was done, and Philip took two mugs of the coffee and some biscuits, and carried them forward.

"I think that we shall not be long before we take our places in the boats," he said, when the ladies came out, in his usual cheerful voice, "and you must make as good a meal as you can before you are called up. Then, I think you had better go aft to the saloon so as to embark with the other ladies."

Constance looked at Madame Duport, who said, "Do all the ladies go in one boat together?"

"As a rule in case of hurry," he said, "the women always embark first; but I should think here they will be

told off between the larger boats so that their husbands and sons can be in the same boats with them."

"We hope that you will be in the boat with us, Mr. Clitheroe. It would be a great comfort to us to be with some one we know. Besides, as you are Constance's cousin, you are her natural protector."

"I shall certainly try to go in the same boat with you. I will go aft and see what arrangements have been made that way."

"We will wait here until you come back anyhow," Annette said.

He returned in a few minutes saying that the lists had been made up, and that the four female second cabin passengers were told off to the boat hanging on the starboard side opposite the door leading down to their cabin.

"I was in the boat on the other side," he said, "but I have just spoken to Davis, one of our fellow passengers who was in your boat, and have got him to change places. Of course it made no difference to him, so he will answer to my name when it is called and I shall answer to his. These two boats are nothing like so large as many of the others, but I think you will be quite as comfortable in them, as there being so few women we can manage to make more room for you than would be possible in the larger ones. The second engineer is in charge of the boat. He is a very good fellow, and will, I am sure, do everything to make you comfortable."

A short time afterwards the bell rang sharply, as a signal for the passengers to come up and take their places. The ship was already very low in the water, the fires in the engine room had long before been extinguished, and the pumps had ceased to work. Everything was conducted in perfect order. The officer in charge of each boat called out the names of those who were to take their places in her, and one by one the boats were lowered without misadventure.

That in which Philip Clitheroe and two other cabin passengers, with the four women, took their seats was manned by six lascar sailors and eight stokers, the latter being Africans from the Coromandel coast, known on board the steamers as Seedy boys.

The boat rowed eight oars, the six men not required taking their seats on the floor of the boat. The second engineer took the helm.

Annette and Constance sat on one side of him and the other two women on the other, the male passengers on the bench next to them, Philip being next to Annette. The work of lowering was safely accomplished. The vessel was now so deep in the water that her action of rolling was dull and heavy, and the boat was lowered without difficulty and the falls safely cast off. The waves, now that those in the boat were so near the surface of the water, looked alarmingly high.

"There is not the least fear unless we get it a great deal worse than this," the engineer said. "They are first-rate boats, and will live in almost any sea. This is one of the smallest of them, but I don't know that I wouldn't as lief be in her as one of the big ones, especially as being wider they are more closely packed with passengers, and have a store of provisions and water in proportion. There you see how easy she rides; not a cupful has come into her. You will soon feel quite at home in her, and think nothing of the waves. Can either of you gentlemen steer?"

"I can," Philip said. "I have been knocking about in yachts, and can manage a sailing boat fairly."

The other two passengers shook their heads.

"Then we must do watch and watch, Mr. Brown, while the wind lasts. After that anyone can steer who has got eyes in his head. What is our course? I have got it all down on paper in my pocket, but I have not had time to look at it yet. My orders are to keep as close together as we can. The captain is on board the jolly-boat and will hoist a lantern at night for us to steer by. The Keeling Islands lie about three hundred miles south-east by south. The captain is going to make for them. If we are blown out of our course and cannot make them, then we shall steer for Java, but keeping as much in the ship track as possible. We are sure to be picked up before long. There, the last boat has left the ship. Thank God they have all got away safely. It is always a risky business getting boats away from a sinking craft, and it is well indeed that we had plenty of time to get everything done quietly and regularly."

While they were talking, Constance and Annette sat perfectly quiet. Constance saw at once, by the way the lascars took their seats in the bottom of the boat to windward and made themselves as comfortable as they could, that they had no thought of immediate danger, and though

the sea looked to her terrible, she supposed that this was only her inexperience, and began to look round at the other boats. One of Annette's hands grasped her arm, and each time a wave rolled up the grasp tightened.

"You must have seen worse seas than this, Annette, by a long way, among the Islands."

"Yes, I can remember some terrible storms there; but then you see I was not out in a boat in them."

"I suppose you will not call this a storm at all?" Constance said to Mr. Solden, the engineer.

"No," I should call this a fresh breeze. I fancy we shall get it a bit stronger yet, but I can assure you there is no safer craft in the world than a good open boat, well handled, and though I have not had very much to do with boats since I entered the service, I was always sailing when I was a boy. I was born at Portsmouth. My father was an engineer in the dockyard, and that is how I came to take to it; but I had two uncles who owned wherries, and until I was apprenticed to my trade I was always knocking about with them, and could handle my boat as well as they could. The first officer would have sent a quartermaster with us, but he is an old acquaintance of mine and knows that as far as handling a boat goes I am as good as any seaman."

In an hour or two the sense of danger passed off, and even the other two female passengers, who had wept copiously on first leaving the ship, partly from sheer fright, but more from the thought of their dresses and valuables that were lost to them for ever, cheered up.

"Now, Mr. Brown, I appoint you second in command, and your duties will be to take your trick at the helm. You two gentlemen I appoint joint pursers; you will have the issuing of rations. There is no means of cooking food, but under my seat there is a kettle and spirit lamp stowed away, and a quart of spirit and a canister of tea. I like a cup of tea before I turn in after my watch below, and always keep the means of making one in my cabin. Knowing there would be ladies on board, and that it might be a comfort to them, I slipped them in under here when the stores were being put on board."

"That was good of you, Mr. Solden," Constance said, gratefully. "How far do you say it is to these Islands?"

"About three hundred miles."

"How long shall we be doing it?"

"Ah, that depends upon the wind. If it keeps as it is now, and we can lay our course, we shall be there in two days and a half or thereabouts. I take it we are going about five knots through the water now."

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CHAPTER XVII.

At twelve o'clock the party had in the boat their first meal. It consisted of tinned meat and biscuits, and there was a small keg of rum aft, and each sailor received his half-a-pint of water with a tiny measure of rum in it. The male passengers had the same, while for the ladies the kettle was set to work and tea made. As the engineer had stowed away two tins of preserved milk with the tea, nothing was wanting. There were but two cups, one of which was allotted to Constance and Annette, and the second to the other two women.

"I think, Mr. Solden, that I could manage to rig up a sort of partition, six feet from the stern, for the ladies. Two of them can sleep upon the sheets and the other two in the bottom of the boat. If we lengthen the tiller lines a bit we could steer forward of that."

"It will be a very good plan if you could manage it, Mr. Brown; but I doubt whether you will find it easy, as we have no hammer or nails."

"I can cut the two uprights from one of the bottom boards, and by jamming the end in behind these stringers and cutting notches for them to go into they will be pretty steady. I have got a pocket knife with endless contrivances. Among them is a gimlet, and by making a couple of holes in the upper plank I can with a bit of lashing fasten the upright perfectly firm and secure. When they are done it only needs a line across the top and a rug thrown over it. Then when the ladies like to be alone they can have the screen, and can take it down when they choose to give us the pleasure of their company."

"Capital," Mr. Solden said, while an exclamation of gratitude broke from the ladies.

Philip got up one of the bottom boards and with his great jack-knife cut off two strips three inches wide and three feet and a half long.

"They would look better if they were not so wide," he said, "but that is no great consequence, but it is necessary to have them strong, or the wind would be too much for them when we get the rug on. Now, Mr. Gifford, do you cut a notch in your side just the width of this strip and I will do the same here."

Half-an-hour's labor and two notches were cut, and the supports when fitted in these and jammed firmly behind the stringers seemed fairly stable.

"Now for the lashing," Philip said, and taking down his strip he made two holes through the upper part of the plank of the boat, and then handed the gimlet to Mr. Gifford to do the same on his side.

"Now, before we put them up, lash them, and we will make three holes at the top."

"What do you want three holes at the top for?" Mr. Solden asked.

"One for the cord to carry the rug, the other two for stays. If we make a couple of holes, one three feet forward and the other three feet aft we can then stay them so that they will be as firm as posts."

When the contrivance was finished it was pronounced perfect. The rug was hung up and two holes cut through it for the yoke lines to pass. One of the boxes was placed in the middle for a seat for the helmsman, and the other three men sat in the bottom of the boat.

"The wind is freshening," Mr. Solden said in a low tone to Philip, "I am afraid we are in for a big gale. You see it is heading us already, and we can't lie our course now. We are two points off it," he added, as he looked down at the compass between his feet. "I don't so much mind the gale, for she is a capital sea-boat, and though she would be better if she were a couple of inches higher out of water I have no fear of her living through it. What I am afraid of is that we may be blown altogether out of our course. It may blow from all points of the compass before it is done, and there will be nothing for us to do but to run before it—there is no lying to with a boat of this rig."

"If we are once blown away from the island we may have a bad time of it. It is some six hundred miles to Batavia, which lies a little to the north-east of the point where we abandoned the ship."

"We have got provisions enough on board to last with care for a month, but I don't think the water would hold out for anything like that time if we get hot weather. Of course, we might be picked up, but the sea is wide, and there is not a very great deal of traffic upon it. I hope and trust we may make the Keelings."

Towards night the wind rose and it was blowing a gale. The sail had been reefed down to the smallest dimensions, and before it got dark all the boats had been put dead before the wind, and for some time the lantern in the jolly-boat could be seen whenever they rose upon a wave. It was delicate work steering, as it was necessary to keep the boat dead before the following waves which would have filled her in an instant had she broached to.

Before night had quite set in the ladies had been made as comfortable as possible. Constance had taken the seat on her side, Annette preferring to lie at the bottom of the boat. All had plenty of wraps, as this had been strongly impressed upon them, and when they had lain down a rug was tucked over them extending right across the boat and completely shutting them out from the whirl of the storm outside.

"The light is fainter than it was," Philip said, as at midnight he handed over the lines to the engineer. "I think the jolly-boat is going faster than we are, and is gradually getting out of sight."

"That is likely enough; she has a lot more beam and can stand more sail than we have. Do you think we could show a little more?"

"I don't think so," Philip said. "As likely as not we should carry the mast away, and then we should broach-to before we could get out oars. It will be far better to loose the other boats than to run that risk, especially now as we are altogether off our course and are running nearly due east. I have just struck a vesuvian to have a look at the compass."

As soon as morning broke Mr. Solden and Philip looked round anxiously for the other boats, but even upon the top of a wave no sail was visible.

"There is no saying where they are," the engineer said. "Some may be in front of us and some behind, or they may be on one hand or the other. When you are sailing close hauled boats will all travel about the same line, but

in running they will soon scatter. One may carry her sail to port, and the other to starboard, and as long as they are full you cannot tell on a dark night whether you are a point or two off the wind or not. Well, it cannot be helped, but I wish we could have kept together."

For three days the gale continued, blowing in turns on all points of the compass. The sea was a terrible one, and half the men by turns were kept bailing, the empty meat tins serving well for the purpose. All on board were wet to the skin day and night from the spray that dashed over them, though Philip's two waterproofs spread over the women kept much of the water from them.

"I think it is nearly over," Philip said on the fourth morning. "The clouds seem breaking up."

"Yes, I think the worst is over. Thank God for it. I thought several times yesterday that the end was come."

"So did I," Philip agreed; "I thought nothing could have saved her once or twice; but she is a splendid sea boat."

An hour later he got up, and said cheerily, "Ladies, you can look out now; the storm is breaking, and we shall have the sun out in a minute or two."

There was a movement among the mass of wraps. Constance was the first to sit up.

"I do not see much change," she said, looking round, "the waves are as high as they were yesterday. I peeped out then for a minute or two, but it was too terrible to look at."

"It will be some hours before the sea begins to go down, but look, there is the sun," and as he spoke the clouds cleared away and the sun burst out from among them.

"That is better, indeed," Constance said. "Get up, Annette, here is the sun out. You will soon get warm and dry now. There, let me pull you up."

"If you will pass me the kettle and spirit-lamp I will make you some tea, Constance."

"Indeed, you will do nothing of the sort," Constance said. "You and Mr. Solden have been working for us for the last four days. It is hard indeed if we cannot manage to boil some water for ourselves, or rather for you, for I shall insist that you take the first cups. Now put up the rug, please, while we tidy ourselves up a bit."

They were indeed four dishevelled-looking women. For three days and nights they had been covered up, expecting instant death, wetted by the spray which in spite of waterproof and wraps found its way in. Thrice in each day they had had a ration of biscuit and meat passed to them, and water, qualified with brandy from Philip's flask, which they received peremptory orders to drink. But the heat of the sun speedily revived them. Handbags were opened, and combs and brushes taken out, and by the time the water was boiling they looked comparatively fresh and bright. Tremendous as the sea still was, it had lost its terrors for them.

Constance kept to her determination. Mr. Solden and Philip had to drink the first cup of hot tea. Then the four women partook of it, and by the time they had done the kettle was boiling again, and Mr. Gifford and his companion were served. The kettle was kept at work until all the crew had been provided with a pannikin of hot grog.

By mid-day the wind had dropped greatly and the sea was sensibly calmer. The sun had not again been obscured, and his powerful rays had completely dried all the wet clothes, and with a renewed sense of warmth and comfort the spirits of all rose, and even the woe-begone looking lascars, who had lain almost without moving through the gale, began to look cheerful, while the Seedy boys, in a group forward, chatted and laughed in high glee. The screen had long since been taken down.

"Where is this island, Mr. Solde ? You said two days and a half, and it is now more than four days since we left the ship. We ought to have been there long ago. I am sure we have been going fast enough."

"You are asking more than I can tell you," the engineer said. "We have been going fast enough through the water, but we have been going east, west, north, and south, to say nothing of the other points of the compass, and I have no more idea where the islands are than the man in the moon. You see my business is to drive a ship along but not to navigate it, and even if I were a navigator I could do nothing without a quadrant or sextant."

"Then do you mean to say that we are quite lost, Mr. Solden ?" Constance asked in dismay.

"Well, it is not so bad as that. We have got our compass, and we know whereabout Java lies, and we have now

got our head in that direction. Java is a big island you see, and we are sure to hit it. We may not hit it just at the port we want to find, which is Batavia, but we are safe to strike it somewhere, and must coast along until we do find a port. But I hope that we shall be picked up long before we are there. You see all the shipping between Australia and India comes somewhere along in the line where we are, and it will be hard if we don't manage to get sight of something or other before long."

"I will set to work and pack these things a little more ship shape," Philip said, "they have shifted a bit during the gale."

So saying he again packed the barrels of biscuits and cases of preserved meat, which was piled across the boat just aft of the stroke oar's thwarts, forming a sort of low barrier between the passengers and the crew. Between the next thwarts were four eighteen gallon barrels of water.

"Just tap them with that thole pin, Mr. Brown." The first tapped was the one in use, which was already three parts empty. The next two gave a hard sound. "Full to the bung," Mr. Solden said approvingly, but as Philip struck the fourth he uttered an exclamation of dismay. "Empty, by thunder, here, take the helm." He threw the rudder lines into Mr. Gifford's hands and sprung forward. "What has happened?" he asked.

"I don't know," Philip said, "here is the bunghole at the top all right."

The engineer passed his hand along the barrel, the hoops at one end were loosed.

"There is the mischief," he said. "It may have been they were loose before they filled them, it may be that as the boat rolled these two casks may have bumped a bit each time. However, there it is; it has allowed the staves to open a little, and every drop is lost. This is a most unfortunate affair, Mr. Brown, most unfortunate. Our supply before was short enough in all conscience, and the loss of this water may cost us all our lives. You see we have got now only thirty-six gallons, and say eight gallons in the cask we first broached—forty-four gallons. There are twenty-two of us, so that gives us two gallons of water apiece, eight quarts. Suppose we allow a pint each, that is only sixteen days' water."

"Sixteen days will take us to Java," Philip said.

"Ay, with favorable winds ten would do, or even eight; but suppose we have calms?"

"What then? Would it be best to try and find these islands?"

The engineer shook his head decidedly. "I have not an idea of their position," he said. "My opinion is, as far as I have an opinion, that we are not very far from the point we started from. But that is little more than guess work. Blown about as we were for three days, and running all the time some seven or eight knots an hour, I don't believe that any sailor could spot our place on the chart within a hundred and fifty miles. As it is, we know that we are going in the right direction, and that we cannot be very far out of the course of ships. I think our position is a bad one, anyhow; but our best chances lie in holding on our present course."

"That is settled then," Philip said. "What do you say? Shall we say anything about the barrel being empty?"

"They know it forward already," the engineer replied. "They know the difference between a full and empty cask as well as I do, and in any case I would have told them so as to reconcile them to being put on such short allowance of water. I am afraid we shall have difficulties with them before we have done. I have my revolver in my coat pocket. I always had it hanging in my cabin, and I knew that on such a voyage as this it might come in useful."

"I have a revolver, too," Philip said.

"I am heartily glad to hear it. You and I with revolvers can keep all those fellows at a distance."

The very next day the number of mouths was reduced by one. One of the passengers was a delicate young fellow who was making the voyage for the sake of his health. He was in a weak state when they left the ship, and the three days and nights of incessant wet had exhausted the remnant of his strength. After drinking the hot tea in the morning he had lain in the bottom of the boat with his eyes closed. Mr. Solden, looking at his face, had said to Philip, "I am afraid that poor young chap won't last long." They had from time to time given him a little brandy and water, but he was scarcely able to swallow it.

Just as night came on Philip, bending over him, touched his arm. He started and put his hand over the young

fellow's heart and listened for his breathing. "He is gone," he said in low tones to Mr. Solden: "don't say anything about it now. It will be a shock to the ladies. Let him lie where he is, and we can drop him overboard after dark. There are no means of burying him."

"And no occasion, poor young chap," the engineer said. "It will make no difference to him whether he sinks down in a hammock with a shot at his feet or whether he floats awhile. I don't think in any case he had many weeks to live. I noticed him several times on the way down, and it seemed that he was losing strength fast instead of gaining it."

The body was quietly put overboard during the night, and in the morning Philip took the news to the ladies that one of the number was gone.

Another week had passed, and as if the wind had exhausted itself during the three days' gale, it had dropped into a dead calm, and the sail had been lowered and the oars got out. There had been great discontent on the part of the lascars and Seedy boys when they were informed that the allowance would be cut down to a pint a day, for the sun blazed down with tremendous power, and as soon as they took to the oars they began to suffer severely from thirst. Two of the lascars and one of the Seedy men understood English, and Mr. Solden explained to them they had certainly six hundred miles to go, and that unless they happened to strike at the right point their distance might be considerably increased.

"We shall not do more than fifty miles a day at the utmost," he said, "though we may do over that the first two or three days; but we cannot rely upon it, so that we shall anyhow be twelve days, and unless we hit the right point at first may be several days more than that. We are a strong crew. There are fourteen of you and only eight oars to man. These two gentlemen and myself will take it by turns to row, so that we shall have a full relief, and can change every four hours. We will all rest for four hours in the middle watch, which will give us all eight hours' sleep at night. We shall want that to keep our strength up. If you are patient, and do your duty, we shall all be saved. At any rate, you will have to obey orders and do your best. The first man that mutinies I shall put a bullet into his head."

So the work began ; but although for the first two days something like fifty miles a day was made, this distance then began to fall off rapidly. The boat was laden with a number far beyond her proper burden, and rowed heavily. The heat was exhausting, and the want of water told terribly on the men.

The lascars, by no means a strong race, succumbed rapidly.

"They are no good for hard work," the engineer said, contemptuously. "They do well enough for washing the decks of a steamer, but that is about all they are fit for. The fellows have got no backbones. If you were to take one of these fellows by the feet, Mr. Brown, and I were to take him by the head, just as you would wring linen, I believe we could twist him up into a rope. Those Seedy boys are worth three of them when it comes to work."

Fortunately among the stores put on board was a good stock of tobacco, and the negroes when not at work smoked incessantly. Philip had also brought a large canister, and kept his pipe going, except when at the oar.

"I envy you," Mr. Gifford said. "My mouth is as dry as a furnace as it is, if I were to try and smoke it would choke me."

"So it would me," the engineer said. "I like a pipe and a glass of grog together, but I could no more smoke with this sun pouring down upon me than I could fly."

"It is quite the contrary with me," Philip said, "I am never thirsty when I am smoking, and even now I do not feel any great want of water."

The ladies suffered less. Philip had on the first day that the sun came out with full power erected two wooden stanchions in the stern of the boat similar to those he had before made, and over these and the others he fixed a large rug like an awning. Sitting there quietly, and free from the labor of the oar, they suffered less than the men, but at the same time they felt the heat greatly, and the fact that they knew that until evening they could get no water increased their thirst.

By Philip's advice Annette and Constance, instead of drinking their allowance, which was made into tea night and morning, soaked their biscuits in it, and so took it gradually, keeping the tea that was not sopped up, and contenting themselves when thirsty by dipping a corner of

their handkerchiefs into this and sucking it. The other two women, however, had not the same self-control, but drank off their portions as soon as they received them, refusing even to wait until they were made into tea. One of them was from the first very despondent, and was constantly expressing her conviction that they would never see land. She presently sank into a state of dull despair.

"That woman will die unless we increase her allowance," Philip said one evening to the engineer.

"Then she must die, Mr. Brown," he replied sternly. She is infinitely better off than the men, or than we are, who have to work ten hours a day at the oar. All our lives are dependent upon making our store of water last. If she chose to be patient and quiet, as Madame Ronan and her niece are, she would do as well as they do; but whether or not, I am resolved that the allowance shall not be exceeded by any one. The water is common property, and if one has more, the others have a right to have more, too."

On the ninth day after leaving the ship the woman died. She was wrapped in a rug, some lashing put round it, and was lowered overboard into the sea.

The lascars now absolutely refused to work longer, and several of the negroes were wholly unfit for the labor.

"What do you think, gentlemen? Is it worth while to bring on a fight over this? If I thought there was a chance of reaching land before the water was gone I would say 'make them pull;' but I don't see there is a chance of that. The last three days we have only been crawling along; we have not made twenty knots a day on an average since we began rowing. Two or three of the Seedy boys have rowed fairly, but the rest have only just dipped their oars in and taken them out again. We had three chances at first, one has gone. We have but two left; one is that the wind may get up and take us along, the other that a ship may pick us up."

"I agree with you, Solden"—for in the companionship of common danger they had become Solden and Philip to each other, for the latter had winced whenever he was addressed by the name he had assumed, and had asked the engineer to call him by his Christian name instead. "I have been thinking for the past two days that we might as well give up the rowing, for we could never get there in

time. If we had as many Englishmen on board as we have these fellows we should have reached land by this time."

"Ay, perhaps we should; but I don't know. Thirst takes a terrible lot out even of the strongest men. But we must look out now, Philip. When they have once given up rowing they will take to talking, and we are pretty sure to have trouble. You see, argument is not much good to a man half mad with thirst. You may tell him that if he is content to suffer a bit and hold on, he gives himself a fair chance of being picked up. That is true enough; but his view is, 'I am dying of thirst. I may as well die to-morrow as a fortnight hence. Let me have one big drink first.' Well, if they won't work they must drink less. I think, Philip, we ought to reduce the ration to half-a-pint. We have got, I calculate, a gallon a man left. That will give us sixteen days, and even in these regions we may calculate on having a breeze before that. Besides, we have another ground for hope. Some of the other boats are pretty sure to have got separated from the rest, and will obey orders and make for Batavia, and if one of them gets there the Dutch are safe to send out a steamer at once to search for the rest."

"Yes, that is so," Philip said. "I am sure, as far as I am concerned, I can do with half-a-pint of water, now there is no more rowing to be done, as well as I could with a pint when I was working away all day in the sun. Besides, Solden—and I wonder we haven't thought of it before—the meat might help us; we haven't opened a tin now for the last six days, for nobody would touch the last, but I think that if small quantities were served out it would do to chew even if we could not swallow it. There is a certain amount of moisture in meat, and it would give us strength too to hold out."

"Yes, it is much the best plan," the engineer said. "I will tell the men that as there will be no more rowing, and we can rig up a sort of awning with the sail and shall only have to lie quiet all day, that I shall reduce the ration to half-a-pint, and that will enable them to hold out for nearly three weeks, and we are pretty sure to get the wind before that, even if we are not picked up by the search steamers which may be sent out to look for us. But mind there is pretty sure to be a row, so keep your pistol handy."

The engineer stood up and informed the men of the determination that had been arrived at, and of their

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reasons for it. The announcement that there would be no more rowing was received with satisfaction, but there was a cry of dismay and anger when they understood the ration of water was to be reduced. There was a hasty consultation among themselves, and then several of them drew their knives and were about to rush aft, but the sight of two levelled revolvers at once quelled their courage, and they threw themselves sullenly into the bottom of the boat. They roused themselves, however, when Mr. Solden ordered them to lower the sail and to rig it up as an awning. The yard was used as a ridge pole, one end being lashed against the mast and the other supported by one of the floor boards, eight feet long, placed on end, and stayed to the sides of the boat. Two oars were cut in half, and with these the sides of the awning were stretched out.

All hands, including those aft, now poured buckets of water over each other as they had done several times a day since the termination of the gale, as they thus obtained considerable relief. The ladies had refused to adopt this method.

"We are doing very well," Constance said. "Our clothes don't dry as yours do, and the discomfort would more than counterbalance the relief. We douche our heads two or three times a day, and keep our hands and wrists hanging over in the water, and I think that does us a deal of good."

They had heard, in silence, the engineer address the men. "It is a hard thing to determine to lessen our supply," Philip said to them when the work of fixing the awning was completed, "but I am sure it is the best."

"I should think so," Constance said. "Annette agrees with me that we can do with less water than we have been having. It must have been terrible for you, working so hard, but sitting here quietly and taking it so gradually it has been plenty for us."

The other woman had heard the announcement with cries of anguish, and threw herself down in the bottom of the boat, where she was now lying. Constance looked down at her and shook her head.

"She would suffer no more than you do," Philip said sternly, "if she would behave as you do."

He had for days been irritated by the constant complaints and outbursts of temper on her part. "If she will

not behave as a sensible being, she must suffer. She is no worse off than anyone else, and I consider her conduct to be disgraceful. I saw her snatch the cup out of your hand this morning before you had finished it, and drink the remainder, and Solden and I had determined that if she does anything of the sort again we will send her forward among the natives, and you shan't be annoyed by her any longer."

To Philip the change was a pleasant one. He had between his spells of rowing been too exhausted and too parched with thirst to talk, but he was now able to sit quiet and chat with the ladies.

Annette bore up wonderfully well. She had always been of a contented disposition, and now did her best to keep up her spirits for the sake of Constance. The girl herself was unfeignedly cheerful. In spite of the hardships they were suffering she felt a strong sense of happiness. The cloud between her and Philip had entirely cleared away. She saw how he exerted himself to keep up the spirits of the party, how thoughtful he was for their comfort, and she felt that whatever had been the temporary effect of the words she had spoken to him that his feelings toward her were unchanged.

Mr. Gifford was a light-hearted young man and did his share in keeping up conversation, and many a laugh rose from the stern of the boat, startling the men forward, who muttered angry assertions to each other that the passengers must have got a secret store of water of their own. They had kept night and day a watch upon the cask, and were assured that it was never touched except when the rations were drawn and served out night and morning in equal quantities to all.

In the evening Constance always started a hymn, the others joining in. After half-an-hour's singing, Mr. Solden offered up a short prayer that help might be forthcoming, and that they might be saved from the perils that surrounded them.

Forward there was for the most part gloomy silence. Several of the men had taken to drinking sea water, which, though giving temporary relief, enormously increased their sufferings.

On the twelfth day of the voyage two of the negroes became delirious and jumped overboard, and on the next

day one of the lascars and another of the Seedy boys died.

Constance implored Mr. Solden to increase the allowance of water.

"We can bear it, Mr. Solden, because we are patient and because we know that we are in God's hands; but those poor creatures have nothing to sustain them."

"I am sorry for them," the engineer said, "but they have the same chance of life as we have, and I won't throw away what chances we have. It is possible to support life on the allowance we have. If they choose to throw away their chance by their own mad conduct in drinking sea water, they must do so; but they shan't throw away ours. You agree with me, gentlemen?"

"Entirely," Philip and Mr. Gifford said at once.

"You see, young lady," Mr. Solden went on, "they ought to suffer less than we do instead of more, for they are accustomed to a hot climate, and do not feel the heat as we do."

All this time a vigilant look-out had been kept for a sail, but the line of the horizon remained unbroken, and one of the party aft watched by night as well as by day against any sudden movement on the part of the men forward.

On the fourteenth day, Mr. Solden, standing up to look round as usual, uttered an exclamation of joy.

"There is a dark line on the water to the west," he said.

"Thank God, there is a breeze coming. Now, men," he said, cheerfully, "get down the awning, lash the sail on to the yard and get it up. Mr. Gifford, do you take my pistol and I will go forward and lend a hand."

In a few minutes the sail was hoisted, though several of the crew were too exhausted to be able to assist.

It was another half hour before the breeze reached them. It was very light, but sufficient to fill the sail and make the boat move through the water.

The ladies' awning was also taken down to enable them to get the full benefit of the breeze. For three or four hours the boat glided along, and the spirits of the crew rose, and they took their rations of water with more cheerfulness than usual, and two or three took a biscuit, though for the last three days these had been untouched.

"I am afraid," the engineer said, standing up on the boxes to get a wider view, "that we shall lose this little breeze before long; but you must not be disheartened,

ladies, the change has set in, and we may rely upon wind before long."

By twelve o'clock the light air had entirely died away. The disappointment of the natives was extreme, and although Mr. Solden tried to raise their spirits by the same assurance that he had given to the ladies, it was useless. Some of the men threw themselves down at the bottom of the boat; others sat rocking themselves backwards and forwards, groaning and crying at intervals.

"Pray give them an extraration, Mr. Solden," Constance pleaded. "You say we may hope for wind now, so surely we can afford a quarter of a pint each."

"Well, I think we may," the officer agreed; "and we will put a spoonful of rum in each allowance. I have been keeping that for bad weather, and we can spare it very well."

There was a cry of joy from the men when Mr. Solden announced that an extra allowance would be served out, and one by one they came forward and drank their gill of weak grog; some tossing it off at a gulp, others sipping it little by little. To three men who were too weak to raise themselves Philip carried their allowance, as the men could not be trusted to pass it forward.

The rest of the day passed slowly, no signs of another puff of wind in their vicinity were to be seen, but Mr. Solden several times made out light flaws of air in the distance, and assured them that there was every prospect of wind before many hours were over.

That night Philip kept the first watch from eight to twelve, Mr. Solden the middle watch, and at four o'clock Mr. Gifford took up the duty.

Two hours later Philip was aroused from his sleep by a loud cry and a heavy fall. He sprang to his feet. The natives were pouring aft. He took the situation in at a glance, Gifford must have dozed on his watch, and the natives had seized the opportunity.

They were headed by two of the lascars, the leading man had struck down young Gifford, and with a bound had thrown himself upon the engineer. Philip saw his knife descend, just as Mr. Solden struggled to his feet, and as he sank back again and his assailant lifted his hand to strike again, Philip closed with him, grasping the arm that held the knife with one hand. He heard a scream from

Constance, who had torn down the rug that had served as an awning, and sprung to her feet, and he saw another lascar with uplifted knife close upon him.

By a desperate effort he hurled the man with whom he was struggling against the new-comer just as his knife descended, sending him staggering back, and the next moment flung the assassin overboard. At the same instant the engineer's revolver cracked, and the second man fell dead.

The sound recalled to Philip the weapon in his pocket. In a moment it was out, and two sharp reports sounded, and the nearest of the Seedy boys fell. The rest, with a yell for mercy, dropped their knives and threw themselves down. At this moment Constance joined Philip, holding Mr. Solden's revolver in her hand.

"It is all over now, Constance: I knew we should have it sooner or later. We shall have no more trouble with those fellows."

"You are wounded, Philip."

"There is no great harm done," he said. "It is only a gash on the shoulder. I wish it were no worse with the other two. Will you stand here, dear, on guard, while I can see what can be done for them."

Constance nodded. She was trembling, and her color had faded now that the danger had passed, though there had been a flush in her cheek and her hand was steady as she took her place by the side of Philip.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LEAVING Constance on guard, Philip Clitheroe turned to the wounded officer.

"Bravely done," the latter said, feebly. "You have thrashed the scoundrels handsomely. You can do nothing, lad ; they have done for me ; the fellow stabbed me over the left breast, and it has gone through my lungs. I had just strength for that one shot, and then as I dropped the pistol that brave girl snatched it up. You have won a treasure, Philip. She is one in ten thousand," for from their calling each other by their Christian names, Mr. Solden had supposed that Philip and Constance were engaged.

"Can't I do anything?" Philip urged.

"You can give me a drink of grog, lad ; then let me lie here, and look to Gifford. I hope to God he is not hit as hard as I am."

Philip raised Gifford and placed him in a sitting position by the side of the boat. Annette had by this time joined the party.

"Here is the wound," Philip said, "just below the shoulder. He was struck from above, and I hope that the knife has glanced down inside the ribs without touching the lungs. I know you have scissors, Annette ; will you cut off his coat and shirt. I will help you directly, but I must first get some drink for Solden."

He lowered the dipper into the cask and poured some rum into the water.

"I don't think there is any occasion for you to watch any longer, Constance. The fellows are too disheartened to try again. Will you attend to Mr. Solden, while we look after Gifford."

Philip now turned to Gifford again. "Tear a strip off the bottom of your petticoat, Madame Renan," he said. "It is an awkward place to bandage, but we must manage somehow."

As soon as the strip was torn off Philip cut off a portion of it and wound it up into a wad, which he placed over the

wound, and bandaged this on as tightly as he could by passing the rest of the bandage two or three times round the body and over the shoulder.

"I think that will do," he said, "if you put a pin into this end."

Then he mixed a little strong rum and water and poured it between Gifford's teeth, previously laying him down in the bottom of the boat and placing a rug under his head.

"Now, madame, I must get you to see to me, for I am bleeding pretty freely, and it won't do for me to get weak just now. Take hold of the sleeve of my coat and draw it off as gently as you can. That is it; now you can slit the shirt sleeve up and get at it."

It was an ugly gash extending from the shoulder to the elbow.

"Cut the sleeve off altogether," he said, "and make a roll of it and lay it along the wound. Then I will have another strip of your petticoat for a bandage. That will do; don't be afraid of hurting me. It must be done tightly to bring the edges together. There, that will do capitally."

At this moment the sail gave a flap and then bellied out.

"There is the breeze again, lad," Mr. Solden said faintly. "I told you it would come. Thank God, you and this brave young lady may be saved to be happy together yet."

Constance was kneeling by the dying man's side, and Philip could not see her face, but he felt his own flush hotly.

"Don't grieve for me, my dear," Mr. Solden went on. "I have no one at home to take it to heart, and it makes little matter whether it is now or twenty years hence. I was getting pretty near tired of voyaging to and fro. It seems such a long time since I was a boy at Portsmouth. They were pleasant days, too, when I used to sail across to Ryde, and sometimes up to Southampton. There was Tommy Johnson used to go with me—a round-faced chap with blue eyes, and my cousin Joe; poor Joe, he was drowned when I was serving my apprenticeship."

His voice had become slower and fainter as he went on, and Constance could scarce hear the last words. The lips moved again and he muttered "Full steam ahead." There was one more struggling breath and then he lay still and quiet.

Philip put his hand on her shoulder. "You had better go back to your place, Constance, the poor fellow has gone. Draw the screen again."

During this scene the third woman had never moved, but lay listlessly with her head on the gunwale.

"Philip, please give me some brandy and water. Her lips are black and parched, and she seems quite insensible."

Philip filled a half-pint pannikin and passed it aft. "Do you and madame take a drink first, Constance, I am sure that you must both want it. Pour a little down the woman's throat. If she revives I will give her some more. We need not be so particular now; there are less mouths to feed, and it seems to me that the wind is freshening steady. We shall have a nice breeze ere long, and it is just in the right direction."

"Now, you forward there, examine if there is any life in those three men. If not, heave their bodies overboard. There are two others forward, who, I think, died in the night."

The men who had been shot were all dead, as were the two in the bow. "Now, men, I advise you to return to your duty, and if you work cheerfully and well until we get in I shall say nothing about your share in this affair. If you don't, I shall hand you over to the Dutch authorities as mutineers, and you will be all hung to a certainty."

"We plenty ready work, sah," one of the Seedy boys said. "Those bad men led us wrong. We plenty sorry made bobbery."

"Well, you had better not do it again, anyhow, for I shall clear the lot of you out if you do. Now just tell the other men what I say, and then get some buckets and a mop and wash the boat out thoroughly. If you behave well I shall serve out a double allowance of water for breakfast to-day."

There were now but six of the crew left forward, and as those who had led the attack were doubtless the moving spirits in the affair, Philip had little fear that they would again venture on any such step. In half an hour the boat was thoroughly washed down and all signs of the late conflict removed.

The boat was running through the water at some four knots an hour, for she was now fairly in trim, being greatly

lightened by the loss of half those who had started in her, and by the water and provisions consumed.

When all was clear, half a pint of weak grog was served out forward, with some biscuit and meat. The breeze moderated the heat, and the rustle of the water against the bends was a grateful sound in their ears.

"How is your companion?" Philip asked through the screen.

"She is better, and she will be better still, I think, when she has had something more to drink."

"We must have breakfast," Philip said cheerfully, "and that will do us all good. I have just given the men a double allowance and we will take the same. I want you to manage something to keep the sun off Gifford. I think you might try him with another spoonful or two of brandy and water, and put something wet round his head. Now that we are sailing I must attend to the rudder lines."

The breakfast was eaten with more zest than had been felt since the calm set in. Gifford was then attended to, and presently opened his eyes. He looked round in a dazed way.

"Don't try to move, Mr. Gifford," Annette said, stooping over him. "There has been trouble with the crew, but that is all past. You have been badly wounded, but we hope you will get over it. You must lie quiet."

"We will soon get you round, old fellow," Philip said cheerfully. "We have got the wind at last and are bowling along merrily. Don't ask any questions now, or try to talk; you have had a very narrow escape, and must keep yourself quiet for a bit. If we go on like this, and I should not be surprised if we go faster, we shall see the coast of Java in another four days, and then we will soon have you on your legs again."

Gifford smiled feebly and then closed his eyes, and by his regular breathing they saw ere long that he was asleep.

The wind continued to freshen, and by the afternoon they added a knot to their speed.

"That will do for us nicely," Philip said. "We want no more and no less."

The wind continued to blow steadily, and in the afternoon of the fourth day after the fight Philip saw the men forward talking excitedly together and pointing ahead of the boat.

"Dar is land, sah, sartin sure dat land."

Philip saw something that looked like a faint haze in the distance, but could not have told whether it was land or a light cloud.

His eyes indeed were heavy. He knew on the morning when the breeze sprang up that he could not steer alone for the four or five days which must elapse before they could reach land. Constance also had recognized this fact, and as soon as they had settled down after their first meal she said, "You must give me lessons in steering, Cousin Philip. It does not seem difficult. You seem to hold both the ropes tight and the boat goes along straight."

"I shall be glad to teach you, Constance. With a quiet steady breeze like this there is really no difficulty in it, but it wants attention and care. You see that black mark on the side of the compass case?"

"Yes, I see that."

"Now you see that the letter E on the compass is just in a line with that. Well, you have to keep it so. If you see the E go to the right of that mark, you have to pull the right hand cord. If it goes to the left, you pull the left hand; but with a breeze almost dead aft like this she almost steers herself, and the less you pull the lines the better."

"That seems perfectly easy. Now give me the seat and let me try." She found it was at first much more difficult than it looked, and do what she would she could not keep the E on the black mark.

"You pull the strings much too hard, Constance. The least touch is sufficient."

"But I cannot keep my eyes off the compass at all, Philip. You only glance at it occasionally."

"I steer by the sail as long as the wind keeps perfectly steady. It is only necessary to glance occasionally at the compass, and you will soon see that if you let the boat go on her own course she will keep very near to the point, and an occasional slight pressure on one line or the other will be all that is required."

After two or three hours' practice Constance learned that she could keep the boat straight with but little trouble.

"Now, Philip, you must lie down. It is quite impossible for you to keep up night and day. I will steer, and Annette will keep a watch upon the men."

"I will lie down then," Philip replied. "I don't think the men will give any more trouble, but we dare not risk it. If I am to be vigilant to-night I must get a few hours sleep, if possible, in the day; but be sure and wake me if there is any change whatever in the force or direction of the wind."

And so during the next three days Philip slept five or six hours each day. The woman in the stern had improved much. The comparative freshness of the air, the somewhat larger supply of water now served out, and above all the hopes rekindled by the steady progress of the boat, effected wonders for her.

Young Gifford seemed to be making progress, but his recovery was retarded by his bitter regret that he should have slept on his post, and that that sleep should have cost the life of Mr. Solden. Still, he was mending, and Philip began to entertain hopes that his diagnosis of the wound had been a correct one, and that no vital part had been injured by the lascar's knife.

The joy of all on board was great indeed when they became assured that it was really land before them.

As soon as they could see that it stretched right across their course, Philip turned the boat's head somewhat to the north.

"The Straits must lie there," he said. "We will bear on the course that we are now holding until we get close in, and then coast along until we get to the northern point of the Island. If we see a village and the landing seems easy we will run ashore and get a barrel of water and some fruit."

"Are the natives friendly?"

"Oh, yes. The island has been in Dutch possession for hundreds of years, and the natives are semi-civilized, cultivate spice plantations and that sort of thing. There is no fear of any trouble whatever with them."

The next morning when Annette and Constance woke they saw that the boat was running along the shore at a distance of about half a mile.

"I think that we are just at the northern point of the Island," Philip said. "It seems to me to trend right away there, but in another few minutes we shall open a point far enough to see."

It was indeed, as Philip supposed, the entrance to the Straits, in a few minutes the sheet was paid out, the helm put up, and they were again steering east.

A pint of water was served out to each, and Constance made tea for those in the stern, a luxury that had for the last four days been given up, as the supply of spirits for boiling the water had almost come to an end.

They passed several villages, one or two of which were large enough to be called towns, but they agreed that as the wind was so favorable it was better they should go on at once to Batavia, where they would be sure to find comfortable accommodation, people who could speak English, and a ship perhaps that would take them on their voyage.

The coast was very beautiful, and after seeing nothing but sea and sky for so long was doubly appreciated. Native craft stole along by the shore ; inland hills rose one behind another, for the most part covered with verdure, though some of them rose boldly up in rocky precipices almost from the water's edge.

The next day a large town, with shipping lying anchored off it, was made out, and a couple of hours later they landed at Batavia. As they neared the wharf they were hailed with shouts and waving of hats, and as they set foot on shore were surrounded by many of the crew and passengers of the Aden, and their hands warmly shaken by many with whom they had not exchanged a word on board ship. The captain was among them.

"We had almost begun to give you up," he said. "We got in six days ago, and a steamer at once set out to look for you."

"Are we the only boat that was missing?"

"No, there is another, the cutter, still unaccounted for. The other boats all arrived safely, dropping in one after the other. The last came in two days ago. But I see your number is greatly diminished. Where is Mr. Solden? He was in command."

"He is dead, sir. He was stabbed by one of the lascars. One of the male passengers and one female died, and one is, as you see, seriously wounded, but he is, I hope, recovering. Five of the natives either died or jumped overboard ; four were killed in the fight."

By this time Mr. Gifford had been carefully carried ashore by four men.

"Well, I am heartily glad to see some of you safe," the captain said, "your story will keep. We will go up at once to the hotel and get the ladies and this poor fellow into quarters there. The place is pretty full as you may imagine,

but some of the gentlemen will turn out to make room for them. They will find out rooms for you. We were delighted, as you may imagine, when the report came that a white boat under sail was approaching, for we felt sure that it could be no other than one of our missing craft."

As soon as the ladies were safely cared for, Philip sat down to a hearty meal, and while he was eating it, learned from the captain how the other boats had fared. After the storm they had all to take to their oars, but being as it seemed further to the north than was Mr. Solden's boat when the wind dropped, had been occasionally helped by light breezes. They had all been on short allowance of water before they reached Batavia, but had not been reduced to great straits.

Many of the passengers were quartered in the houses of the Dutch merchants, who showed them the greatest kindness and hospitality. Some of them had already left in a sailing ship for Australia, and an arrangement had been made with another vessel to take on the rest in a week's time. The officers and crew of the Aden were to go up to Singapore in a steamer which had come in on the previous evening.

The surgeons who examined Mr. Gifford's wounds gave strong hopes of his recovery. He would have died long before this, they agreed, had his lungs been pierced, and unless fever or some unforeseen complication set in there was every ground for hope that he would pull round.

Philip saw nothing of his cousin or Annette for the first two days after his arrival in Batavia. The latter broke down completely after the strain was over, and Constance remained in attendance on her.

On the evening of the third day Philip sent up a note to Constance, begging her to come down and take a stroll in the cool, as he was sure she would be ill if she shut herself up so long. He was waiting for her when she came downstairs, and but few words were said as they went out together.

The sun had set, and the short twilight was fading and the stars beginning to show the deep blue of the sky.

"I can hardly believe it is all over, Philip, and that that terrible voyage has come to an end."

"It was terrible in some respects," Philip said; "yet I think that on the whole, in spite of its discomforts, I was

never happier in my life. You see, Constance, we got to be really cousins, which we should never have done otherwise."

The girl was silent. "I have thought over the past very often, Philip," she said, after a long pause, "and there is one thing I must ask you. because it has puzzled me ever since. Why, if you had known who I was, should you have shunned me like the pest? I know it wasn't because you hated me for depriving you of your fortune. I know you too well to think that for a moment; but if it wasn't that, what was it? You have never heard anything against me, have you?"

"No, no," he said earnestly, "it was not that; how could you dream of it?"

"But it must have been something, Philip. You were speaking from your heart, and I felt that every word was true, and that as well as the rest."

"And you believed that when I told you I loved you, that was true also."

"Yes, Philip, I could not doubt it. Why else should you have told me so when you did not know who I was?"

"Why, indeed," he repeated, "and if I loved you then, when I had only seen you in pleasant times and in fair weather, how much more must I do so now that I have seen you in trials and dangers—now that I know so much more about what you are."

"We both of us know each other better," she said gently. "And yet I feel that altogether in that you are changed to me, that whatever it was that would have made you shun me like a pest was still between us. I think I have a right to know what it is."

Philip was silent.

"My dear," he said, after a pause, "it is a secret not altogether my own. It was that which drove me from England—a shameful action that I feel has dishonored my name. Not my own action, Constance, but which yet seems to weigh more upon me than if it had yet been. It is a secret I cannot tell even to you."

"And yet you would have married Miss Renan," Constance said after a long pause.

"Yes," he said, "but I should have married her as Sam Brown. Not for years, not until after an event that may be years distant should I have told her my name."

"Is that all you are going to tell me, Philip? All you will ever be able to tell me?"

"I don't know," he said, hoarsely; "perhaps some day —" and he stopped.

"Is that quite fair, Philip?" Constance urged. "Quite fair to me as well as yourself?"

"It is not fair," he said passionately. "I will tell you before we separate, before you sail home, your mission fulfilled. You have a right to know, and when I have told you you will feel that it is impossible for me to say to Constance Corbyn what I said to Miss Renan."

"You give me your solemn promise that you will do so before we part?"

"On my word and honor, Constance; it will be a horrible story to have to tell, but you shall hear it."

"I am content with that," she said, quietly. "Now let us go back to the hotel."

A few days' rest and quiet restored Madame Duport, and she was almost herself by the time the vessel was ready to sail for Melbourne.

"Is there anything the matter between you and Mr. Clitheroe, Constance?" she asked, when they had been two or three days at sea. "You do not laugh and chat together as you used to on board the Aden. You are not even as you were in the boat. You are friendly, but it is quite different. Has he asked you again, and have you refused him? I thought it would have been different this time, and I hoped so so much. It would have been such a happy ending to your troubles."

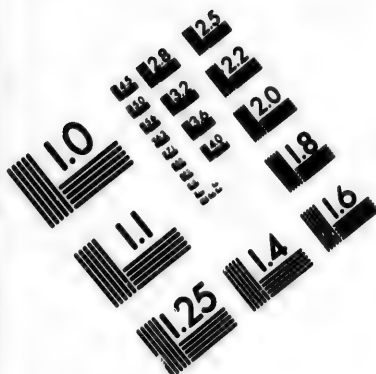
"He has not asked me again, Annette. I don't know that he ever will, though he knows well what my answer would be now. We have had a talk together, Annette. I cannot tell even you what it was, but I shall know some day. Please don't speak any more about it."

"It cannot be about money," Annette urged. "One or other of you must own the Corbyn estates. If you love each other, what matters it which it is?"

"Money!" Constance repeated with scorn. "Had neither of us a penny in the world, and were Philip Clitheroe a cripple and unable to work, I would slave for him with my bare hands."

After this Annette had nothing more to say. It was another of the puzzles connected with the child's affairs,





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and she supposed like the rest it would be solved in good time.

The voyage was uneventful, and they had a speedy run to Melbourne.

"And where next, Constance?" Philip asked, as they leant upon the bulwark and watched the shore.

Constance looked round in surprise. "I forgot you did not know where Morson lives. It is near Brisbane. We shall have to take a steamer from here, at least so Mr. Harbut told me. It is a comfort having you with us. When I talked about coming out here, I said that I didn't see any reason why a woman should not travel alone, still less two women; but I have changed my mind about it now, and it will be very nice with you to see about everything, and act as protector in general. I only hope that we shall not find Morson gone."

"Why should you find him gone?" Philip asked.

"Well, you know, that was what I told you when I was so stupid as to suspect you."

"I am sure you did not tell me anything about Morson leaving. You did not say a word about him."

"No; of course, I did not enter into particulars. Our idea was, Mr. Harbut's and mine, you know, that the people, whoever they were, who had been down to Woodstock to get Morson's address out here, might have either sent out or written to him. Of course we don't know for certain that they did get this address. When Mr. Harbut asked Morson for it—I mean the Morson at Woodstock—he told him that he was not sure what his brother's address was, but that he would write out, and perhaps he would let him know in about three months. Mr. Harbut found out that the brother was telling a story, for that he often got letters with the Australian postmark; so what we thought was that his brother had told him not to give his address to anyone until he gave him leave. Well, these other people had been at Woodstock a short time, ten days or a fortnight, after my father's death, and there would have been time for a letter to go out to Sydney and for an answer to come back before Mr. Harbut went there. Mr. Harbut said the butcher seemed a malicious sort of fellow, and to take a sort of satisfaction in keeping him in the dark, and he thought it likely enough that he had promised to let these other people know if anyone else called to inquire about his

brother. Our idea was, Philip, that when these other people knew we were on the track of Morson, they would send out at once, if they had not done so before, to get him out of the way, or to bribe him to refuse to give us any information. So I determined to start by the next steamer, thinking it quite possible that whoever they sent out might be a passenger by it too. That was how—" and she hesitated.

"How you came to suspect me, Constance, and very natural too," Philip, who had been listening, with a troubled face, said quietly. "And you thought these other people would know you on board the steamer?"

"We were almost sure they would, Philip, for we were watched on our way to the office, and though we got out of the cab and went on in an omnibus, Mr. Harbut said that he did not think we had thrown them off the track."

"Poor little girl," Philip said, "you have been horribly persecuted. What you say is quite possible," he went on. "These other people may have written out before you found out this man's address, or they may have sent someone out in the steamer. By-the-way, how did you find out the address if the butcher would not give it?"

"Mr. Harbut found out that the man who is here had a married sister living at Banbury, and he went there and saw her, and she gave him the address at once."

"He seems to have been very busy, this Mr. Harbut," Philip said, shortly.

"He was wonderfully good and kind," Constance said simply, "he and a young lady he is engaged to, a Miss Leicester; she got me the post of companion with Miss Peyton, who is an aunt of hers, and who was as kind to me as they were."

Philip stood some time watching the shore in silence. "We will go on by the next steamer, Constance, and I hope that, as you say, we may find this Morson at the address you got. Of course, a good deal of it will depend upon whether he is an honest man, and then a good deal will depend upon how he is doing out there. If he is an honest man he will, of course, refuse to accept a bribe, and will probably knock down the man who tries to make it. If he is not honest, but at the same time is doing well, it will probably take a larger bribe than these other people can give him to sell out and move. What was the offer you were going to make him?"

"I was going to offer him a thousand pounds to come to England to give evidence that he was present at the marriage, or if he would not agree to that, to offer him a smaller sum to make a deposition before a magistrate. Mr. Harbut said that it would be far better that he should come to England, because we should have to get all sorts of proof to satisfy an English court that the magistrate was a magistrate."

"I think we shall find Morson there, Constance, and shall get him to give his evidence either there or in England. Ferris told me it was Harbut's idea that the man is aware your father never acknowledged you, and has been intending to make money out of you or me. When he sees us both there together, and sees that there is no possibility of getting money out of either one or the other, he may not be averse to tell what he knows."

"Unless he has been bribed by the other people," Constance put in.

"A man who will take a bribe from one side will take it from the other," Philip said. "Besides, he may only have been promised money, which is a difficult thing from getting it. They would not send him over a large sum of money, even if they had it, till they knew that he accepted their proposal, and you see even if they knew that you have started for Australia, they cannot know that you have got his address, and will think that you may never find him, or, at any rate, that you will be months before you do so, and that there will be plenty of time to write again to him when they get his answer, and to bribe him to silence before you get at him."

"That is so," Constance agreed. "It is all so extraordinary who these people can be. It is not you, and who else can there be interested in preventing my proving my mother's marriage. I suppose you have not the least idea, Philip?"

Philip did not reply, and Constance, glancing up, saw such an expression of pain on his face that she was startled. It was the expression she had seen there when her eyes first fell on him on board the Mandalay.

She laid her hand wistfully on his arm, and his face softened.

"You shall hear all about it some day, Constance : don't ask me now."

A steamer was starting in two days for Sydney and Brisbane, and after a pleasant voyage they arrived at the latter town. The party went to an hotel, and as soon as they were settled there Philip went out and inquired at the Police-office whether there was, or had been, a stable keeper or horse dealer there of the name of Morson.

"Oh, yes ; there was a man of that name had a stable here two years ago. What do you want to know about him?"

"I am an English barrister, and have come out to make some inquiries about him."

"He was here some years ago," the inspector said ; "he came from Melbourne. I fancy we made Victoria too hot for him. A good many of these horse dealers are sharp hands, but I think he is sharper than most of them. I heard that in Melbourne he was accused of buying up horses stolen up the country, and clipping and fattening them till their owners wouldn't know them. I don't know that he was absolutely caught at it ; I suppose he wasn't, else he would not have got away here ; but the suspicions are pretty strong against him. When he got here we had a report from them, and he got a hint that a sharp eye would be kept on him. Anyhow for some years he went on, so far as we know, straight enough. Then he began to get into his old ways, and we had two or three complaints against him for fattening up old screws and selling them at high prices to greenhorns. There was one very bad case we heard of, but when it came to the last the man wouldn't prosecute. I suppose he didn't like to risk being laughed at for having been taken in over a horse. However, after that Morson thought it was as well to clear out for a bit, and he sold his business, or pretended to sell it—one is as likely as the other—to another man, and went out to a farm he has got about twenty miles from here. He always bred a few horses there, but I believe since then he has gone in on a biggish scale. He has bought up another farm or two adjoining, and runs two or three hundred horses there, and if he will but keep straight ought to do well, for I have heard that there is no better judge in the colony of the points of a horse. He has got a few thorough-breds there, and ought to breed good stock."

"Then I am likely to find him there, I suppose?"

"Yes, as far as I know. But, of course, he may have gone up the country buying horses."

"Thank you, I am much obliged to you," Philip said. "I have nothing absolutely against the man, but I want to find out the particulars of a transaction in which he was mixed up in England years ago."

"I don't think you will get much out of him, unless it suits him to tell," the inspector said. "He is a close fellow, and a very shrewd one."

"I am ready to pay well for my information, inspector."

"Ah, well, in that case, if it does not incriminate himself, you may get it."

The next morning early a carriage from the hotel started with Constance, Annette, and Philip for Ash Farm.

When they reached the house, which was of good size, but had a neglected appearance, as if its owner cared but little for appearances, they alighted from the vehicle.

Very few words had been spoken during the drive out. Constance was anxious and agitated, now that the moment was at hand when she would either succeed in obtaining evidence which would prove her mother's marriage or fail altogether.

Philip was silent also, and had it not been that Constance felt perfectly assured that the loss of his estates was not weighing on his mind, she might have thought that, disinterested as he might be, he felt a little regret now that the moment had arrived when the matter would be definitely settled.

Annette was the only one of the party who was at all disposed to be cheerful. This trip was to her the end of her long journey, and whatever came of it she would shortly be on her homeward way towards Victor and her comfortable cottage at St. Malo. She greatly wished that Constance should attain her object, but she felt sure that if she failed she would become in another way mistress of Corbyn Court.

A man came out from the house as they drove up, and in answer to Philip's inquiries said that the boss was out somewhere on the farm, but would be back at twelve o'clock to his dinner. As it was already past eleven, it was no use going out to look for him, and they walked about the place and looked at some young foals in a paddock near the house until the hour approached.

Just as they reached the door a man rode up who answered so accurately to the description Robert Harbut

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had received of him from the porter of St. Boniface, that Constance was sure he was the man they had come so far to meet. He was dressed in horsey style, with tight breeches, high boots, a cut-away coat, a drab waistcoat, and a green scarf with a horseshoe pin. His face was clean shaved, he had a thin, crafty mouth, eyes with many wrinkles at the corners, and light, thin eyebrows; his hair was brushed smoothly down on his face, with a slight curl lying close on the right temple.

CHAPTER XIX.

THOMAS MORSON drew up his horse as he came up and leapt off.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you," he said to Philip. "If you want either driving or riding horses for ladies I have a nice lot I can show you."

"We have not come to buy but to talk to you on some other important business, Mr. Morson."

The keen eyes closed a little, and a sharp glance was shot at the speaker.

"Come in," he said; "it is easier to talk sitting than standing."

He led the way into a room that was half parlor, half kitchen, and opened a door leading into another room behind.

"Keep dinner back, Jones, till I call for it," then closing the door he stood with his back to the fireplace and looked at his visitors, who had taken seats on the rough wooden chairs.

"Now then, sir, I am ready; what is your business?"

"In the month of November, 1844, you were present at the marriage of Mr. Corbyn with Miss Constance Purcell, at Folkestone Church."

They saw a swift change come over the man's face.

"Oh I was, was I?" he said. "I was not aware of it; and who may you be, sir?"

"I am Philip Clitheroe, nephew of that gentleman, and I supposed until a few months ago his heir. This is Miss Corbyn, my cousin, daughter of the Mr. Corbyn you accompanied on his tour in Europe. It is my wish, as well as hers, that this matter should be cleared up. We know that the marriage took place, but it will be more satisfactory to obtain the testimony of a living witness of the ceremony."

Intense surprise, disappointment, and anger were expressed in the man's face. Then another change passed over it.

"That won't do, young fellow ; you are no more Philip Clitheroe than I am. It was clever of you, very, and you took even me in for a moment ; but that cock won't fight. This may be Miss Corbyn or it may not ; anyhow you are not Philip Clitheroe. I don't know who you are and don't care. You had better have come to me by yourself, young lady, and I might, maybe, have been able to come to an arrangement with you. I say maybe. Now you have tried to get round me with this cock and bull story you have lost your chance. I don't say it wasn't clever of you, 'cause it was, and I might have been taken in if I hadn't happened to know a little about Philip Clitheroe. Now that your business is done the sooner you are off the better I shall be pleased. I want to get to my dinner."

"I am not surprised at your suspicions," Philip said, quietly, "though I own I did not foresee them. I can guess why you think that I am not myself. I believe you have received a letter making you an offer to secure your silence, and you thought that letter came from me."

"You are a clever young fellow," Morson said with a sneer, "and I have no doubt you are thought much of in the London detective force. But old birds are not to be caught with chaff."

"That letter," Philip went on, without noticing his words, "was no doubt written by someone who thought he was acting in my interest. Don't build on it, Morson. I am Philip Clitheroe and you will never be paid a halfpenny. The writer of that letter has heard long ago that I have no intention of fighting this case against my cousin, and that your silence is no longer worth buying. Here are some documents that may help to convince you that I am speaking the truth. Here are circular notes issued by the Bank of Australasia in London to the amount of two hundred pounds, payable to the order of Philip Clitheroe. Here is another letter from the same Bank saying that bills to the amount of a thousand pounds, drawn upon Messrs. Ferris and Ferris of New Inn, The Strand, London, and signed by Philip Clitheroe, will be duly honored, the Bank guaranteeing that payment. Unless you suppose that I have stolen these from Philip Clitheroe, you cannot doubt that I am he. Besides, these papers show at least that at the time they were written Philip Clitheroe was on the point of starting for Australia."

The man stood examining the papers Philip had put in his hand, glancing at him from time to time with his keen shifty eyes, and rubbing his chin nervously.

"All I can say is," he said at last, "that if you are Philip Clitheroe, and if this is Corbyn's girl, you are a pretty blackguard. I can see how the game has been worked. First of all you write to me so as to square me. Then you get hold of this girl and soap her over, and make her think you are a fine disinterested party, and when you have got her to agree to marry you, you think you can afford to throw me over. But you won't. In the first place I don't believe you are Philip Clitheroe, and if you are you will get nothing out of me. You can give out that your wife is Corbyn's legitimate daughter, but you cannot prove it, and no one will believe you. There, that will do. I have nothing more to say to you, so you can be off as soon as you like. Jones," he shouted, "see that that trap is brought round to the door at once."

Philip Clitheroe had flushed for a moment and then turned white at the accusation Morson had made, and he would have sprung to his feet had not Constance laid her hand on his arm.

"It is my turn to speak," she said, as the man ceased. "You are altogether mistaken, Mr. Morson, with respect to my cousin, and no such deceit as that you impute to him was practical. I was perfectly well aware who he was from the first day I met him. He was equally aware that I was the lawful heiress of Corbyn Court, and therefore there was no deceit practiced whatever, and the situation was perfectly understood."

Philip had by this time mastered his emotion of anger and continued quietly,

"You are a little hasty, Thomas Morson, but I can make allowances for you. You are naturally disappointed. Unless I am mistaken you have reckoned for a long time upon making a big thing out of this. You thought that Miss Corbyn was in ignorance of her rights, and would be glad to pay you very handsomely for information that would prove her to be entitled to a fine estate. Unfortunately she has found this out without you, and I can quite allow for your feelings of disappointment."

"Well, I don't want any more jaw," the man said, savagely. "You will get nothing out of me, so you can walk as soon as you please."

"One word more, and we will go. This is our offer: We are of course ready to make you a payment for the trouble you will have in giving your evidence. We can do without that evidence, but it will be more satisfactory to have it, and we are ready to give you a thousand pounds if you will come to England to testify that you were present at the marriage."

Thomas Morson rubbed his chin thoughtfully. He had no doubt now of Philip's identity, and felt that the game he had waited for so long and patiently was lost.

"Well," he said, suddenly, "I have only your word on the matter yet. Who may you be, ma'am?" he turned suddenly upon Annette.

"I am Madame Duport, of St. Malo, the woman at whose house Mr. and Mrs. Corbyn lodged. I think I can remember you when you came up with their luggage the first day they came. The coachman let one of the boxes fall as he carried it in from the gate to the house, and I remember you cursed both in French and English."

The incident came back to Morson's memory as she mentioned it.

"That is right," he said, "and are you ready to take oath that this young lady is the child who was born in your house, and that she is Constance Corbyn?"

"I am ready to take oath to that," Annette replied.

"And that this is Philip Clitheroe?"

"I can take oath to that also," Annette said, "not of my own knowledge, but because Miss Corbyn told me so. She had met him in England."

"Is this so, Miss Corbyn?"

"It is," Constance replied. "I saw him in England, and am ready to take oath that he is Philip Clitheroe."

"Well, I will let you have my answer this afternoon," the man said, after standing for a minute in thought. "Where are you stopping in Brisbane?"

Philip gave him the name of the hotel.

"Well, if you drive back, I shall be over there pretty near as soon as you will. I have a horse that will take me over an hour quicker than yours. I will eat my dinner and think it over as I drive. I won't ask you to take anything, for the place is not fit for ladies, besides I want to think this over, it has come upon me too suddenly to take it all in."

"He will agree," Philip Clitheroe said, as they drove away from Ash Farm. "He may hold out for a little more money, Constance, but you can afford to pay him that."

Constance gave him a quick, reproachful glance.

"We will talk about that afterwards," she said quietly. "Anyhow, whether he is paid one thousand or two it makes little matter so that all this can be cleared up."

"He is a clever scamp," Philip said. "How quickly he jumped at his conclusions. But of course," he added bitterly, "it is what everyone would think."

Constance did not reply. She knew to what Philip was alluding—the accusation that he had seen that the safest plan would be to marry her, the accusation she herself had cast in his teeth. As she sat with her head bent down a tear fell on her hand. Philip saw it.

"I beg your pardon, Constance," he exclaimed, taking her hand, "I am a brute. The fellow did hit me hard, but I was a brute to avenge myself on you. Stop the coachman, I am not fit to ride in the same carriage with you."

"What are you going to do?" Constance asked, laying her hand on his.

"I am going to get out and walk," he said. "No, Constance, you may forgive me but I cannot forgive myself."

"Do not be foolish, Philip. I have never thought you foolish and I don't want to think so now. I know that it was not meant as a reproach to me, but it was simply a cry of pain, a natural cry. It is horrible to be suspected falsely, and I think I begin to understand what you must have suffered."

The journey back was as silent as it had been on the way out. Philip sat back in his corner with his cap pulled low down over his eyes. He was a brute, he told himself over and over again, and utterly unworthy of the love of such a woman as this. He would tell her what he had to tell and then go away and never see her again. He knew she loved him, but in any case, even putting aside this barrier between them, he would not consent to her throwing herself away upon him. He would fight his own way as he had intended to do, and make the most of his life, and it would be best for him never to set foot in England again.

Constance was thinking over the idea that had flashed across her when Philip had said that the letter had been

written by someone who believed that he was acting in his interest.

She thought it strange now that it had never occurred to them before that it was his mother, the haughty woman she had seen at Bath and to whom Miss Peyton had taken so strong a dislike. It must have been she who had thus fought for her son's interest, had set spies on her, had stolen the leaf from the register, and had written to bribe Morson to silence. Philip had discovered it, and in his shame and grief had left England and taken a false name. How he must have suffered. But how could he suppose that his mother's fault need stand between her and him, especially after all that had passed? Had he not saved her life on board the boat, had he not tenderly cared for her, and now was her happiness and his to be sacrificed because his mother had been unscrupulous in fighting for him? No, not if she could help it, not even—and she flushed suddenly—if she had to sue instead of being sued. He had told her once he loved her, and she had scorned him; it was but a just penance that she should have to sue now.

They had taken a basket of provisions with them from the hotel, and the fact that neither of her companions would touch them did not interfere with Annette's appetite. Things seemed to her to be going on very satisfactorily, and if these young people chose to be foolish and quarrel she could not help it. She had had quarrels in her time with Victor, but of course they made it up in due time, and equally of course Constance and Philip would both be sorry for it presently. Young people were always foolish, and she supposed that even Constance, who was generally a thoroughly sensible girl, would be foolish like other people when in love.

So Annette placidly eat her cold chicken, and looked forward to meeting Victor again at St. Malo, wondered how things had gone on in her absence, and hoped the girl had been satisfactory and had got Victor's meals punctually, and had not put too much pepper in the made dishes; Victor could not abide pepper. And so at last they arrived at the end of their journey.

Philip did not offer to go upstairs with the others, but said he would smoke a pipe outside until Morson arrived. He had not long to wait. In twenty minutes a light trap drawn by a fast-stepping horse dashed up to the door.

"Ah, here you are, Mr. Clitheroe," Morson said as he alighted. "I am not long after you, you see. I gave you an hour and a half's start, and I suppose you have not been here very long. I have done it in an hour and forty minutes."

"We have only been in a quarter of an hour," Philip said, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and led the way into the hotel, and up to the private sitting-room where the ladies were awaiting them.

Morson's manner had changed. He had thought the matter over, and made up his mind that the game he had played for was lost. He did not in the slightest degree believe Philip's assertion that he was not the author of the letter he received. "Of course it came from him," he said to himself; "who else could have sent it. No doubt he meant it when he wrote it, but when he found the girl had got on my track—though how she did so is more than I can say—he saw at once that it was the safest and best game to make up to her, and nicely he seems to have humbugged her. But all that is right enough. We have both played to win, and the trumps have fallen into his hands. It is hard when one reckoned on ten thousand at least to get only one. However, that is better than nothing, and will come in very handy. I daresay I can squeeze another five hundred out of them."

Having thus made up his mind to deal, Morson was shrewd enough to know that he was more likely to make a good bargain by civility than otherwise, and when he presented himself before the ladies his manner was an admirable mixture of that of a respectful college scout and of a shrewd horsedealer.

"Well, Mr. Clitheroe and Miss Corbyn, I have thought this business over, and see that it is best for me to meet your wishes as I can. I am sorry now that I spoke so roughly when you came to my place; but you will understand that when a man has a secret that he has looked upon for nearly twenty years as being as good as a big mint of money, it riles him up more than a bit to find that it has just slipped him. But I think it is worth more than you offered me for it. There is no other man living who can prove what I can prove; there is no one else who can set this matter so straight that no one will be able as much as to whisper that Miss Corbyn has no right to her name."

"I think you have a right to value your testimony," Philip said, "but there are other ways of proving a marriage besides the testimony of one who was present at it."

"Not in this case, Mr. Clitheroe; not in this case. You and Miss Corbyn would not have taken this long journey if you could have done without me. Now, it won't suit me to go away to England for six months. As you saw, I have got a biggish business here, and it is growing, but I can do all you want me to do without that."

Philip shook his head. "It is your personal testimony we want. If you were to make an affidavit here we should have no end of trouble over it. We might have to send out a commission—in fact it might give us no end of bother."

"I am not going to make an affidavit, Mr. Clitheroe. But I tell you what, I will make you a fair offer, and what is more I will leave it to you and Miss Corbyn whether or not you think what I shall do will cover the ground. My offer is this: You shall write out a promise to give me two thousand pounds, if I thoroughly satisfy you, and you shall both sign your names to it."

"Two thousand pounds is a very large sum," Philip said gravely.

"It is less than half a year's rental of the estates," Morson replied. "I tell you, Miss Corbyn, my information is well worth the money to you."

Philip looked at Constance, who slightly nodded her head.

"Now, look here," Philip said, "we will sign the promise you speak of, if you on your part will sign another agreeing to go with us to England and give the evidence we require should we not be satisfied with the manner in which you propose to settle the matter here."

"I agree to that," Morson said, without hesitation. "Now if you will give me paper and pen I will write out the one agreement; do you write out the other."

The two papers were written out and signed.

"There is one more thing, before we get to business," Morson said. "I don't want any fuss over this affair. I don't say whether I have acted straightforward all along or whether I have not. I don't say whether things have come into my hands by the gift of others, or how they have come in. I don't want any questioning or any bother, so before

we come to the last point I will get you to give me your promise, Mr. Clitheroe, and yours, Miss Corbyn, that the matter drops here, and that there are no questions asked, and that by-gones are treated as by-gones."

Philip signed to Constance to come to the window apart.

"I don't know what the fellow is driving at, Constance, but I should think we might agree to that. If he can set this matter straight it is nothing to us what knavery he may have been at."

"I quite agree with you, Philip."

"We agree to your conditions," Philip said, as they returned to the middle of the room.

"How do you propose to pay the money, sir? I know that you're a gentleman, but there is nothing like having these things settled straightforward beforehand."

"I have no objection to that," Philip said. "As the paper I showed you states, I am authorized to draw for a thousand pounds on Messrs. Ferris. I will give you a bill for that amount at three days' sight. I will give you another bill for the same amount payable three months after sight. It may go home quicker than we shall, and I shall have to arrange that it shall be met."

"That is quite fair, Mr. Clitheroe, I have got bill stamps in my pocket. I generally pay for my horses in that way. Now will you write out those bills and sign them and hand them to this lady here for her to hold until you say you are satisfied that I have carried out my part of the agreement."

Philip sat down without hesitation and wrote the two bills, and then handed them to Madame Duport, who was working at her knitting as usual, as if she were an entirely uninterested spectator of the scene.

"Is there anything else?" Philip asked drily, for he had not the least belief that any proposal the man might make could prove an acceptable alternative to his going in person to England.

"There is nothing more, Mr. Clitheroe, I am quite satisfied with your promise and that of Miss Corbyn, that by-gones shall be by-gones."

In spite of his quiet manner Philip saw that Morson's face had grown pale, and that there was a nervous ring in his voice. The man put his hand in his breast pocket and

drew out an envelope. He walked across to Constance and placed it in her hand.

"That is my part of the business," he said.

The envelope was unfastened. Constance drew out the contents—a printed paper folded double. She opened it and gave a cry.

"Oh, Philip! the missing leaf of the register!"

Philip stood as if stupefied, and then sprang upon Morson, seized him with both hands by the collar and shook him violently.

"You villain," he exclaimed, "then it was you who stole the register."

"This is not acting according to promise," Morson said.

"It was agreed that bygones were to be bygones."

Constance's hand on his arm did more than the man's words to disarm Philip Clitheroe. He loosed his hold.

"You are right, Constance, we have so much reason to rejoice that it is folly to be angry. Thank God, dear, your rights are fairly established now. None can question now that you are the lawful heiress of Corbyn."

"Thank God, my mother's name is cleared," Constance said. "That is what I have striven for, and that only, Philip. From the first the estates have been nothing to me."

Philip walked across to Annette, took the two bills from her hand and gave them to Morson. "You have performed your part of the bargain," he said, "here is your money. May it do you as much good as you deserve."

"Thank you, sir," the man said, putting the bills into his pocket-book. "Is there anything that you would like to ask me before I go?"

"I should like to know how it was you came to carry out this detestable scheme. It would be satisfactory to know how it came about."

"I have no objection to telling you," the man said.

"There was a man, I don't say it was me, but there was a man who knew that Mr. Corbyn had married Miss Purcell at Folkestone Church. He had heard that Mr. and Mrs. Corbyn had taken up their residence at St. Malo before that lady's confinement. As he knew that the marriage was not known to Mr. Corbyn's father, he thought that this was natural enough. Then he heard from a man at St. Malo that Mrs. Corbyn had died, and that Mr. Corbyn

had gone away, leaving the infant there. Of course, this did not mean much one way or the other, but the man in question thought it might be worth while to watch.

"Well, this man went abroad. Someone paid his expenses and gave him a hundred or two to help him over, but he thought it worth while to learn from St. Malo, and from friends in England, how things were going on. After six years he heard that old Mr. Corbyn was dead. The child was still at St. Malo, and Mr. Corbyn went on as usual at Bath. Then it seemed to him that his secret was worth money. So he came all the way back to England. He only stopped there a week, but in that week he got what he wanted. It may be that he got short of money and sold what he got to me, it may be that it came into my hands some other way, that is neither here nor there.

"Anyhow, when I got hold of this document it seemed to me, just as it had seemed to him, that there was big money to be made out of it if I did but wait. If Mr. Corbyn, as was like enough, married again and had children, or if he didn't, whoever might be his heirs, they not knowing of the existence of that document, would find themselves disappointed. It was not likely that Miss Corbyn knew much about her father's affairs, and when he died that document would be worth a big sum of money to her. Anyhow it would be a valuable paper some day, and so it has turned out, though not by a long way so valuable as I had expected it to prove. I think that is all, Mr. Clitheroe. I am afraid I must trouble you to walk down to the Bank with me with that letter of yours, to show them that this bill is worth more than the paper it is written on."

Philip took his hat. "It may as well be done at once," he said. "I shall not come back for an hour, Constance, you will like to be alone with Madame Duport."

Constance had stood still and quiet, holding the certificate of her mother's marriage in her hand, until the two men left the room. Then she turned, threw herself on her knees by her old nurse, and laying her head on her bosom burst into a passion of happy tears.

It was some time before she was composed enough to speak, and Annette was nearly as much moved as she was.

"Oh, Annette, I am so happy; first for my mother's sake and then for his."

"For his? Ah! I see what you mean, *ma petite*. You mean because you can give yourself and your estate together to him."

"No, I did not mean that," Constance said, flushing brightly, "I meant something else, but as that is a secret of his I cannot tell you."

"I hope there are no more secrets," Annette said, alarmed. "I am sure we have had enough of them. I never want to hear of another secret all my life."

"There is nothing to alarm you here," Constance said, as she dried her eyes. "This is only something between him and me and not terrible at all. And now when he comes back, I wish you to slip out of the room, for I want to have a talk to him by myself."

"That is natural enough, dearie," Annette said, with a smile, "I will be out of the way. I think he has a right to a talk with you, for had it not been for him I don't think with all your cleverness you would have induced that bad man to give up the paper."

In an hour Philip returned, Annette had left the room before he came in.

"Constance," he said, "I could not speak while that fellow was in the room, but I congratulate you with all my heart. I know that the property is as nothing to you in comparison to the pleasure you must feel in having cleared the name of your mother. You will believe me, dear, when I say that I feel no sort of envy at your good fortune, and that from the first moment when I heard of your existence my only desire has been that right should be done."

"We can talk about the property presently, Philip. Now you can tell me, can you not, why I am the last woman in the world you can marry."

"Yes, I can tell you now, Constance, and that, thank God, with somewhat less pain than I had looked to. I think I can tell you everything."

"I know it is hard for you, Philip, it is very hard for a son to speak of a mother's faults even to the woman he loves."

"So you have guessed, Constance," Philip exclaimed with a start.

"Only to-day, Philip. When you said that it was done in your interest, the truth flashed across me, and I knew it for certain from the cry which broke from you when

that man produced the certificate, and your face as you seized him. It was not mere anger at the theft. You knew it had been stolen, and would naturally have felt more pleasure at its recovery than anger with the thief. I thought it over as we were driving back from the farm, and wondered that we had not guessed it before. Who should defend her son's rights but a mother. She considered that you had been wrongly treated and placed in a false position by my father's silence—and she had a full right to consider so—and she determined to defend what she considered your rights to the last. She knew that you would not fight for yourself, and she took the burden upon her, and in fighting for you and for you only adopted means perhaps that she would not have used had she been fighting for herself. You suspected that it was she who cut out the leaf of the register, and it was the thought of that that drove you from England. I read it in your face just now as plainly as if you had spoken. We now know it was not so, but even had it been so we should remember, Philip, that she did it for you. Is this all that stands between us, Philip, is this why you would have shunned me as a pest? You thought your mother had injured me, had even sinned against me, and that this must stand like a barrier between you and me."

"I am glad that you have guessed the secret, Constance," Philip said, taking her hand almost reverently and raising it to his lips, "and I thank God that this terrible wrong was not her act. But, dear, I owe it to you and myself to tell you all, to tell you why I suspected my mother—a horrible thing for a son to have to do. She did not commit that crime, but it was because she was forestalled. I went down to Folkestone and learned that she had been there, that she had even contrived to be alone for a minute with the registers. I cannot doubt what she went there for. She went there to destroy the evidence of the marriage. Thank God, she was spared the crime—it had already been committed.

"I have thought it all over, Constance. She must have known of the marriage. Since I made that discovery I have thought over every circumstance. She went over to see my uncle on the afternoon before his death and they had a long talk together. On my return I noticed how ill she looked, and begged her to put off some friends who

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were coming to dinner. Your father, when he was killed the next morning, was on his way to France. His servant said at the inquest that his master had told him he was going for a week to France. I cannot but think that he told my mother at that meeting of his marriage, and that he was going over to fetch you home.

"When he was killed, the temptation came suddenly upon her. No one else knew of the marriage. Why should it ever be known? She knew from him where it had taken place, she even knew who had accompanied him. How else could she possibly have known that they were married at Folkestone, when you only learned it accidentally from a postmark on your mother's letter. How else can she have been able to send to find out where Morson was, within a fortnight of my uncle's death? How else could she have known of your existence, and have set detectives to watch you almost from the first?"

"It may be as you say, Philip; the temptation was a great one, and she loved you, and she thought that you had been wronged, and in her love she may have determined even to commit a wrong to right you. But people are not judged by their intentions but by their deeds. Your mother has committed no crime, her intentions are known only to you and me and God, and you and I are not her judges. Remember, dear, the words"—and she put her hands on his shoulders in her earnestness—"Her sins are forgiven for she loved much."

Philip could not reply. He took the girl to his heart and held her there.

"Do you know, Philip," Constance said, a quarter of an hour later, "that that story you told me just now has made me very happy?"

"It has, Constance!" Philip said in surprise. "Ah! you mean in its consequences."

"No, I don't, sir," she said, saucily, and then went on more seriously, "No, Philip, it has always been a grief to me that I have had to think ill of my father. I have tried so hard to believe that he did not mean to wrong me and that he meant to have acknowledged me some day, but I could see nothing to justify the belief, hard as I clung to it. But if your theory is true, he intended all along to acknowledge me, and only waited till he thought I was old enough to take my place at Corbyn Court, and when he

was killed he was coming over to fetch me home. You see I can think of him now as having loved me, although he did not care to have me with him as long as I was a child.

"I feared so much that it was not so, I have even feared, Philip, that it might have been he who mutilated the register in order that there might be no proof left of the marriage. I think even Mr. Harbut thought this at one time, though he never said so. That burden was lifted from my mind when this man produced the leaf, and now your story has removed the doubt whether he ever meant to acknowledge me. It is strange, dear, we should both have suspected our parents of the same fault, and that it should turn out that it was the work of another.

"Now, Philip, I must go up and see Annette, and tell her that all our troubles are over and that we are going to be happy, and that the division of the Corbyn estates no longer offers any difficulty. I am afraid she won't be very surprised, for I think she had quite made up her mind as to what would come of it. You must love her too, Philip, for she has been as a mother to me."

"There is no need to tell me that, Constance; I know how much I owe her. Now I will go round to the post and ask for letters for you. You know you said you expected some here."

"I had forgotten all about it," Constance said almost in consternation, "there will be letters from Hilda and Miss Peyton and Mr. Harbut."

"Well, we have been here little over twenty-four hours," Philip said smiling, "indeed I had not forgotten; but I thought it better that you should not get them until I had told you my secret. I wanted you to be unbiased."

"As if anything they could contain would bias me against you, Philip," Constance said indignantly, "and please will you see about dinner. It is seven o'clock, and we have had nothing to eat since breakfast. We have been accustomed to starvation, but it is rather hard to starve in the land of plenty."

"I had forgotten all about dinner, but now you remind me of it I do feel hungry. I will tell them to send up anything they may have at once. I will be back in a quarter of an hour."

CHAPTER XX.

By the time Philip returned the dinner was on the table, and Constance and Madame Duport were downstairs.

Philip went up to the latter and kissed her affectionately.

"I am glad," she said, "I am sure you will make her happy, Mr. Clitheroe."

"Philip, if you please, madame. I am going to be a sort of son-in-law to you, and I am not going to be called Mr. Clitheroe any longer."

"Where are the letters, Philip," Constance said, holding out her hand, "I am sure there must be some for me."

"There are three," Philip said, calmly, "and one is a bulky one; but as we are all famishing I am sure they will keep very well until we have finished."

"He is beginning to tyrannize already, Annette," Constance said, as she seated herself at table. "This is what comes of a girl being won too easily."

The meal was not a long one, and when the cloth was removed and the waiter had left the room, Philip took out from his pocket a bulky packet and handed it to Constance.

"That is not the one I meant," she said, as she glanced at the address, "that is from Mr. Harbut, and is all about business. As that is all settled now, it will keep very well. I want the other two first."

"I want you to read this first, dear. I have a particular reason for it."

Constance took the letter dutifully, and opened it. It contained two enclosures, the one a sealed letter, the other a folded sheet. Constance first read Robert Harbut's letter, and then, without speaking, turned to the open enclosure and read it. A tear fell on to the paper.

"Oh, Philip," she said, "it is horrible to think how I spoke to you that night, and to know that while I was accusing you of every bad sort of thing, you had generously given up everything to me. Oh, Annette, this paper

is a deed which Philip signed before he left England, saying that being absolutely convinced that I was the lawful heiress of Corbyn Court, he had relinquished his claim to that property and made it over absolutely to me. Why did you not tell me so at once, Philip? not that I should have taken it, I never wanted the estates. I thought it was very hard that you should be deprived of them, and I told Mr. Harbut that in any case I should wish you to have Corbyn Court and most of the estates, for that I should not be happier for having them. Not so happy, indeed, for I should be alone amongst strangers, and I only wanted enough to enable Annette and her husband to live without working, and to have enough to live comfortably all my life. Why did you not tell me, sir?"

"Perhaps it was because I was too hurt or too pained to defend myself at the time, Constance, and since then it would have seemed as if I wanted to win your love by making you my debtor. Besides, dear, you know that we did not speak till the night we were wrecked, and after that we had other things to think of, and at one time it did not seem likely that the disposition of the property would make any difference to either of us. Then when we had once reached Batavia, and I knew that I must tell you sooner or later what it was that, as it seemed to me, would prevent me from ever again asking you to become my wife, I was still more anxious that you should not know of the deed I had signed until we had settled that point between us. You could hardly look at the matter fairly had you known of it. It seemed to me that it never could be, and yet had you known of this deed, it would have made it impossible for you to look at the question fairly. I wanted you to take me, if you did take me, from love and not from gratitude. So even had you thought of the letters when we arrived yesterday, I should have asked you not to send for them for the present."

"You must have had a pretty idea of me," Constance said, half laughing, half crying, "to think that I was going to throw away my happiness—to say nothing of yours—because somebody else had done wrong. However, I am glad you did not tell me, dear. I am glad that I did not know about this deed until we quite understood each other. Now, am I to open this other enclosure next? Mr. Harbut only says that Mr. Ferris had given it to him with the request that he would forward it to me at once."

England, says the lawful his claim to me. Why at I should I thought it them, and I wish you to that I should ppy, indeed, and I only band to live comfortably

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"I think you had better open it, Constance. I believe that it is from my mother, and it is written in consequence of one that I wrote to her the day I left England."

Constance opened it with nervous hands. It ran as follows:—

"MISS CORBYN—My son Philip has written me a strongly-worded letter, and has, he tells me, been weak enough to sign a deed making over the Corbyn estates to you on the ground that he has ascertained beyond doubt that you are the lawful heiress. What can have induced him to come to that decision I know not, nor is it material; after the step he has taken nothing appears to me material. One can fight a game against circumstances, but one cannot fight against human foolishness. My son requests, in words which convey a distinct threat, but which I own I do not understand, that I will give you every assistance in my power to establish your legal position. As he has already placed you in possession of the estates, I see no reason to abstain from doing so.

"There are some, perhaps, who would think that I have acted wrongly, but I am in no way ashamed of myself. My brother Algernon, by his miserable weakness in shrinking from avowing the marriage, gave Philip the right to consider himself as his heir. I have regarded him so, and so has everyone else, and I consider that to place another in his position was a distinct and cruel wrong to him, a wrong which there was nothing whatever to justify. Upon the day before his death, your father related to me the story of his marriage, told me of your existence, and said that he was about to proceed to France to bring you home and install you at the Court as his heiress. I was naturally and rightfully indignant, and left no doubt on the mind of my brother Algernon of my opinion of his conduct.

"The next day his body was brought into my house. Among the letters in his pocket was a copy of the registry of his marriage. That copy I burnt. At the time I did so I had no distinct idea of depriving you of your rights. I imagined that among my brother's papers there would be documents found relating to his marriage, and that he would at any rate have taken the natural precaution of furnishing you, or the persons you lived with, with a copy of your mother's certificate. But Algernon was always a weak man, and did things in a half-hearted way, and had never

taken even ordinary precautions to place you in a position to prove your claim should anything happen to him. Perhaps, for a time he had not made up his mind whether he should ever produce you or not.

"At any rate, I soon found that no proofs of such a marriage had been found among his papers. That some document or other probably alluding to your existence had been found, I was convinced by the manner of my son. Knowing full well that he would be likely to take a quixotic view of the affair, I then determined to defend his rights to the utmost, and to prevent the daughter of a village schoolmaster taking her place as mistress of the old home of the Corbys, and to insure my son's retaining possession of it. That in doing so I was not acting according to what ordinary people think right, troubled me very little. I was defending my son's rights, and the honor of the family.

"To him this property meant everything; to you it could mean little or nothing. I knew that Philip, once aware of the existence of even an illegitimate daughter of his uncle, would be ready at once to offer her an allowance. That would have enabled you to live as you had been brought up, comfortably at St. Malo, and to marry in accordance with that bringing up, while your position as mistress of Corbyn Court after such a bringing up would be at once uncomfortable and ridiculous. Therefore, I considered myself justified—I still consider myself justified—in doing my best to prevent your attaining that false position. I at once set detectives to work, and soon found that the family lawyer had been over to St. Malo, and had seen you, and shortly afterwards that you had come to London. Then I saw, in the first place, that you had no proofs whatever of your birth, for if so, formal notices would have been given to my son immediately after the lawyer went over, and, in the second place, that you were dangerous. There was but one thing to be done, and I did it without hesitation.

"I believed that you could not possibly know the church at which your father was married; had you done so, Mr. Ferris would at once have gone there and obtained a copy of the certificate. I determined, therefore, to lose not a single day in destroying the proof. It was a crime, you will say, an offence against the law. No doubt, but that did not deter me for a moment. Philip's fortune was at stake, and improbable as it seemed to me that you could

ever find out where this marriage was performed, it was better to make the matter safe. I went down to Folkestone and found that the leaf of the register had already been abstracted. There were, so far as I knew, only two persons who could know of its existence. My brother Algernon, and the man who had signed as a witness, one Morson, who I remember Algernon once speaking of as having been a college servant, and who had two or three times travelled with him on the Continent.

"I was sure that it was not my brother Algernon who had abstracted the register. He had his faults, but he was not a man to take energetic action of any kind. I therefore made up my mind that it was Morson, ascertained after three months' delay his address in Australia, and wrote to him offering him a payment of five hundred a year so long as he refused to answer all questions respecting the marriage of my brother. That letter was only sent off a fortnight ago. I should have paid the money from my own income, as Clitheroe is mine until my death, subject to a certain yearly payment to my son. A week since I learned that you were on the point of starting for Australia, two days after I received the letter from my son saying that he had made over all his rights in your favor, and I have now learned from our lawyer that he has gone out in the same ship in which you travel. But Mr. Ferris tells me that he was ignorant of your being on board, and that he took passage in that ship at his suggestion.

"After what has happened there is nothing more to be said or done. In accordance with my son's request, made in a manner which, as I have said, I do not understand, I send you Morson's address, which cannot, I have reason to believe, be known to you, and which you might search for a long time in vain. He is living at Ash Farm, near Brisbane. Whether he will give you any information I cannot say, but from what I have learnt of this man, I should imagine he will not do so unless he is well paid for it. It is possible that my son and you may have recognized each other on the voyage. I hear from my lawyer that it is his intention also to search for Morson. If you arrive there together the man may see that with the two claimants before him his secret is no longer worth money.

"If my son and you have not recognized each other, and the man refuses to give you information or to sell you the

certificate, your best course will be to find my son, who took passage under the plebeian name of Samuel Brown—although why he should have chosen such a name is more than I can say—and get him to accompany you to Morson's.

"I do not know that I have anything more to say. I have carried out my son's wishes, and have given you all the information in my power. You think me no doubt a very bad woman. I am in no way ashamed of what I have done, and only regret that I have failed owing to the inconceivable weakness of my son.

AUGUSTA CLITHEROE."

Constance read it through twice, and then sat for a moment or two twisting it mechanically round her fingers.

"Well, Constance," Philip said at last, "what is it? What does she say? You are keeping me on tenter-hooks, can't I read the letter?"

"That is just what I am thinking, Philip; I don't know whether you had better see it or not. It is a funny letter, you see," and a smile crossed her face, "and I like it much better than if it had been written in a different way. She just tells the whole story, dear, and says that she did it for your sake, and that she is not a bit ashamed of having done it, and that she thinks you very weak, but that as you have given the whole thing up it is of no use her fighting any longer. And then she sends Morson's address, which she supposes is what you meant when you enjoined her to do what she could to aid me to prove the marriage. I don't know, Philip, that it would be the least good for you to read it through; still you can see it, of course, if you want to, although I dare say it will annoy you, although it has not annoyed me at all."

"Oh, I had better read it," Philip said, "and have done with it. I shall only be wondering and bothering myself over it. I promise you to put it all out of mind as far as I can. So I had better read it now, and have done with it."

Constance handed him the letter. He read it, and gave it back with a rueful laugh.

"I don't believe any woman before ever wrote such a letter to another whom she had done her best to wrong."

"It is straightforward and honest," Constance said, "and a thousand times better, Philip, than if it had been

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hypocritical and double-faced. Your mother has done us both an immense service, and we ought to feel very grateful to her."

"How on earth do you make that out?"

"Well, if it had not been for her, you would never have come out in the Mandalay. You would never have come out at all. I should have succeeded at last, though with a good deal more difficulty and at a much higher price, in getting the certificate from Morson. Then I should have appeared as the heiress, and you would have at once recognized my rights. I know quite well you would have refused any proposal for the division of the estate, you would never have come to care for me, and if you had, you would never have said so. Altogether, Philip, your mother's interference has turned out most happily for both of us."

"Well, I suppose it has," Philip admitted. "But——"

"We won't have any buts, Philip. I am perfectly happy to-night, and I do not want to have a single unpleasant thought of anyone. I have not a shadow of malice against your mother, and I like her all the better for that letter."

As Annette had gone quietly out of the room directly she saw that the conversation was turning upon Philip's mother, Philip was able to answer Constance in a manner satisfactory to both parties.

When she returned, half an hour later, Philip said, "I want your support, Madame Duport. I have been trying to persuade Constance that the best plan in every way will be for us to be married at once. It will get rid of all sorts of difficulties, and then you see if we are wrecked again on our way back I shall be the better able to take charge of her."

"I am sure, Annette," Constance urged, "that it will be by far the nicest way for me to go back with you to St. Malo, and for him to come over there to fetch me. Besides, we do not want to be staying here, and it will be impossible to be married in such a hurry as that."

But Constance did not, as she expected, find an ally in Annette.

"I think, my dear, that it will be very much better for you to be married at once. I have been thinking so as I was sitting upstairs. I see no reason whatever against it. You can get anything you want here just as well—indeed a great deal better—than you could at St. Malo. You do

not want a great trousseau, you can get all that afterwards. If you did not get married here I should say that it would certainly be best that Mr. Clitheroe"—"Philip," the young man put in—"that Philip should not go back to England in the same ship with you. People would talk on board, and it would be soon seen how matters stood between you, and it would be pleasanter in all ways that you should go man and wife. I should say the same thing if you were my own daughter."

"But the steamer will sail, Philip says, in ten days' time, Annette," Constance urged.

"Very well, my dear, that will give us plenty of time to make all the arrangements, oceans of time."

And so Constance had no further excuse for resistance, and was indeed at heart grateful to Annette for having sided against her, and when the steamer sailed ten days afterwards the names of Mr. and Mrs. Clitheroe and Madame Duport were among the list of first-class passengers.

Hilda Leicester was spending the morning with Miss Peyton, in South Audley-street.

"I do wonder why we have not heard from Constance again," the old lady said.

"I don't think there could possibly be time, aunt. You know when she wrote from Melbourne she said she was just starting for Brisbane, and that if she succeeded there she should come back by the next steamer. Her letter from Batavia, giving us a full account of that horrible time in the boat, said that she was none the worse for it, so there is nothing to worry about at all."

"I should not be surprised a bit," Miss Peyton said positively, "if the next letter tells us that silly girl is going to marry this man with the horrid name—this Mr. Sam Brown. There is no doubt, I suppose, that it was owing to him that the boat and those who were left alive in her got to Batavia, and you saw how she spoke of his bravery and the care he had taken of her and Madame Duport. And in her last letter she mentioned, in a casual sort of way, that this Mr. Brown had come on to Melbourne with them, and that his destination was also Brisbane. It was the casual way that was suspicious, Hilda. The moment I read that sentence I said 'this unfortunate girl has fallen in love with this man.' This is what comes of trapesing about the world. I had made up my mind all along that

the only possible satisfactory ending to all this business would be that she should marry her cousin, which would have made matters comfortable all round, and now she takes up with a man with such a name as Sam Brown, and one knows at once what sort of man anyone with a name like that must be."

"I am sure, aunt," Hilda said indignantly, "that Constance would not fall in love with any one but a gentleman."

"Not under ordinary circumstances, Hilda, I am quite ready to admit that, but you see these are not ordinary circumstances. A girl is thrown for three weeks with a man in a boat, he is kind and attentive, he defends her and shoots down people; he is a hero in her eyes. She says to herself what if he does drop his h's and if his grammar is a little shakey; what are such trifles as these in comparison to a true heart. Why the man's very defects tell in his favor with a girl like Constance," and Miss Peyton rubbed her nose violently.

The door opened and the servant entered with an orange-colored envelope.

"I hate telegrams, my dear," Miss Peyton said, taking it. "In nine cases out of ten they bring you no pleasant news, in fact in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. Either somebody is ill, or at the last moment cannot come to dinner, and there is a vacant chair that it is too late to fill up, or the friends whom you are starting that afternoon to stay with have got measles in the family, or the dressmaker has fallen downstairs and cannot send home the gown you had depended upon. Telegrams are a mistake altogether, my dear."

"Well, aunt, you may as well see whether this is an exception."

Miss Peyton opened the envelope.

"Just what I expected, my dear, the very thing I expected. Constance has married this Sam Brown."

Hilda uttered an exclamation of dismay, for she too had shared to some extent in her aunt's opinions.

"What does she say, aunt?"

"Brindisi. My husband and myself and Annette are coming straight back. Proofs of mother's marriage obtained; everything satisfactory. Shall come direct to

town, leave luggage at hotel, and drive straight to see you. Will telegraph from Dover."

"There, my dear, she has done for herself for good and all," and Miss Peyton handed the telegram to Hilda.

Miss Leicester looked at it, clapped her hands suddenly, and gave a cry of delight.

"What in the world is the matter with you, child?"

"You did not read the upper part, aunt. Don't you see it is to Miss Peyton from Constance Clitheroe. She has married her cousin after all. You know, aunt, Robert told me he was going out in the same ship with her."

"That must be a mistake, my dear, altogether," Miss Peyton said. "She has never said a word about her cousin in any of her letters; and if he had been on board of course she would have mentioned it. No; Constance has evidently had her head so full of these business affairs that she has, without thinking what she was doing, written Clitheroe instead of Brown, and small blame to her. Besides, you know the list of passengers in that unfortunate steamer was published with the accounts of the wreck, and there was no such name as Clitheroe among them. Do not buoy yourself with any false hope. Constance Corbyn has become Mrs. Sam Brown, and a most lamentable affair it is. Well, my dear, as soon as I get the telegram saying they are at Dover, I will send off to you and Robert to come and meet them here, for I am sure I shall never be able to welcome her and this Mr. Sam Brown with decent warmth. I am disappointed in Constance, altogether disappointed."

"Well, aunt, we must hope that Mr. Brown is a very good fellow in spite of his name. I have great faith in Constance, and cannot believe she would have married anyone that wasn't nice."

"He was a second-class passenger, Hilda. I looked particularly in the list when Constance wrote about him."

"Well, aunt, she was a second-class passenger, too, and I am sure she is nice, so there is no reason why he should not be."

Four days later Miss Peyton received the expected telegram. As it was this time sent from "Constance" to Miss Peyton, she had no means of proving the correctness of the conviction she had expressed that the girl had

signed the wrong name by mistake, and she and her niece awaited the arrival of the party in South Audley Street with anxiety and impatience.

Robert Harbut had some difficulty in repressing a smile as he listened to Miss Peyton's lamentations over the folly of her protégé. As soon as he had received a letter from Hilda, giving the contents of the telegram, and Miss Peyton's conviction and her own that Constance had married the Mr. Brown who had been a companion in the boat that reached Batavia after so much suffering, then he seized his hat and rushed down to see James Ferris.

The latter, as soon as he heard the news, gave a shout of exultation.

"Hurrah, Bob, it has come all right, and the very idea of sending Philip in the same ship she was going by has set everything straight. I felt sure that things were going all right when I read the account of the wreck and saw that he was in the same boat with the girl, and that they had gone through all sorts of hardships together, and that he had put down a mutiny and had been wounded. I felt sure then how it would be, and so it has turned out. Well, this is a happy ending to the affair. You see she says she has obtained the proofs of her mother's marriage, so that in fact she gives him Corbyn Court instead of him giving it to her. Upon my word that plan of mine of sending them out together to Australia was the happiest idea that ever occurred to me."

"I shall not say a word about it in Audley-street," Robert Harbut said when their first excitement had calmed down. "Hilda and the old lady are evidently in a great stew about it. It will be the best fun in the world seeing Miss Peyton try and make up her mind to be civil to Sam Brown. I won't tell Hilda, because I am quite sure she could not keep the secret from her aunt." And so Robert Harbut derived intense amusement from the conversation of the two ladies as they awaited the arrival of the party from Australia.

"There is the cab," Miss Peyton said at last, as a vehicle was heard to drive up to the door.

"Now, Hilda, we must really try our best not to let the poor girl see how disappointed we are in her, and I do hope I shall be able to endure her husband whatever he may be like."

The door opened and Constance entered first, and running up to Miss Peyton threw her arms round her neck.

"Welcome back, Constance. Welcome back, my dear. I heartily congratulate you."

Constance then turned to Hilda, who had while the embrace was taking place glanced at the gentleman who had followed Constance into the room, and had instantly assured herself that she and her aunt had formed an altogether erroneous impression of Mr. Sam Brown, and that he was not only a gentleman but a very good-looking one.

As soon as she had greeted Hilda and shaken hands warmly with Robert Harbut, Constance turned to Miss Peyton.

"Miss Peyton, this is my husband, Philip Clitheroe."

But Miss Peyton had already recognized the young man she had seen at Bath, and was standing in stupefied astonishment.

"But, Constance," she stammered, "I thought," and she paused.

"You thought what, Miss Peyton?" Constance asked in surprise at her manner.

"Miss Peyton thought that you had married Mr. Sam Brown," Robert Harbut said gravely, heedless of an indignant "Robert!" from Hilda.

"So I did marry Sam Brown," Constance said with a merry laugh. "We both sailed under false names, Miss Peyton. I was Miss Renan, you know, and Philip was Mr. Sam Brown. I knew him from the first, but he had no idea that I was Constance Corbyn, or knew that Constance Corbyn was a fellow passenger of his, until after he had asked me to marry him."

Miss Peyton now recovered herself and held out both her hands to Philip. "I am glad, Mr. Clitheroe, more glad than I can say. This was what seemed to me the best thing that could happen from the moment when Constance first told me her story, but when she wrote to me about what this fellow passenger of hers had done for her, and it was not very difficult for me to discover what she thought of him, I was afraid my hopes that way had failed altogether."

"But, Miss Peyton, I thought my telegram would have told you. I sent it from Constance Clitheroe."

"Yes, my dear, but I thought your wits had gone wool-gathering, and that you had been thinking so much of the

unpleasantness of having to turn your cousin out of his estate that you had put in his name by accident instead of your new one."

In the meantime Hilda had turned indignantly upon Robert Harbut.

"Do you mean to say, Robert, that you have known all along that Philip Clitheroe and Mr. Brown were the same person, and that you kept me in the dark about it?"

"Not all the time, Hilda. Ferris had never mentioned to me the name Clitheroe had booked under, and though I guessed how it was directly you read me the telegram, it was not until I went to see him that I found that Sam Brown and Philip Clitheroe were one and the same man; but it was too funny listening to your joint lamentations to enlighten you until the time came."

"I am extremely angry with you, sir. You might have told me if you did not think fit to tell my aunt."

"You know very well you could not have kept the secret, Hilda."

"I could, sir. I can hold my tongue just as well as you can."

"Perhaps you can, Hilda, but your eyes would have told it for you. Miss Peyton would have learnt it five minutes after you had been in the room with her."

By this time, Miss Peyton was warmly shaking hands with Annette, while Constance introduced Philip to Hilda and Robert Harbut.

"I owe you both so much," Philip said. "Constance has told me how great your kindness has been to her. Indeed, I don't know what she would have done if it had not been for you both."

After a general conversation for some time, Constance drew Robert Harbut aside.

"Mr. Harbut, I want to add to my obligations to you by asking you to get this sent down to the Bath papers. Philip knows nothing about it, and I have written it myself. You know how ill-natured people are, and although we know how false it is, there are people who might say that Philip married me to keep Corbyn Court. So I have written this. I wish you would look through it and alter anything that you think badly worded, and put it into the best shape, and send it down as from yourself."

"I shall be glad to do so, Mrs. Clitheroe. I think your idea is a very good one, and I will see that it is carried out."

Bath was two days later astonished by a paragraph which appeared in the various local papers.

"A ROMANTIC MARRIAGE. TRUTH STRANGER THAN FICTION. A marriage was solemnized on the 21st of June at Sydney, New South Wales, which will come as a surprise to Bath and its neighborhood. Upon that day Mr. Philip Clitheroe was united in marriage to Miss Constance Corbyn, only daughter and heiress of the late Mr. Algernon Corbyn, of Corbyn Court. To our readers it will be a matter of news that Mr. Corbyn was married, but the event took place nineteen years ago, during his father's lifetime. His wife dying in childbirth at St. Malo, in France, Mr. Corbyn thought it better for various reasons not to make the marriage public until his daughter was of an age to take her place as his heiress at Corbyn Court. She was most carefully brought up and educated abroad, and Mr. Corbyn was actually on his way to fetch her home when the sad accident occurred which terminated his life. Some evidence as to the marriage being found by Mr. Clitheroe among the late Mr. Corbyn's papers, he devoted himself to the search for legal proofs of the marriage that would place his cousin in her proper position as mistress of Corbyn Court. Finding that one of the witnesses to the ceremony was alive in Australia, Mr. Clitheroe determined himself to go out there to obtain the requisite proofs, leaving before he started a deed with his lawyer assigning his life interest in the Corbyn estates to his cousin, and stating that he was morally certain that a marriage had been duly solemnized between her mother and his uncle.

"Unknown to him, Miss Corbyn was herself going out to Australia with the same object, under the charge of the lady by whom she had been brought up. This circumstance was, however, known to Mr. Clitheroe's lawyer, who conceived the happy idea that it would bring about by far the most pleasant termination of the business were the two young people to come together, and it was upon his advice that Mr. Clitheroe took a passage on board the same ship with her. Both parties being desirous that the matter should be kept private until their investigations

were concluded, took their passages under assumed names. The desired result was attained. Mr. Clitheroe fell in love with Miss Corbyn without having the slightest idea that he was her cousin, and the terrible wreck of the *Aden*, which will be fresh upon the memory of our readers, brought the affair to a climax. The Mr. Brown who so distinguished himself in the conflict with the mutineers in the open boat was Mr. Clitheroe, and among the ladies who owed their lives to his bravery was his cousin.

"The *eclaircissement* duly took place, and Mr. Clitheroe and Miss Corbyn found that their marriage settled the question of the ownership of Corbyn Court without further trouble. Their search for the witness of the marriage proved successful, and it was found to have taken place at the Parish Church, Folkestone, being duly recorded in the register of that church.

"Our readers will agree with us that a stranger and more romantic marriage seldom came about, and Mr. and Mrs. Clitheroe are alike to be congratulated upon an event which, it must be admitted, was of all others the most suitable and satisfactory. We understand that Mr. Clitheroe and his wife will shortly come down to take possession of Corbyn Court."

The same post that took down this notice for the newspapers carried a letter from Philip Clitheroe to his mother. It was the joint production of himself and Constance, this being necessitated by the fact that he had written and torn up a dozen letters and given the task up as hopeless when she came to his assistance. It was short and to the point:—

"MY DEAR MOTHER,—Your letter to Constance came duly to hand. We both say let bygones be bygones, and let us start as if the last six months had been wiped out. We both know that what you did was done from your love of me, and Constance is quite of opinion that this would justify almost anything. When we meet, therefore, let there be no allusion to the past, certainly no allusion will ever be made to it by either of us. Happily I shall still be joint owner of Corbyn Court, though not in the manner you had thought, and everything has turned out for the very best, and indeed Constance asserts that it could never have come about had it not been that we were both driven by

circumstances to go out to Australia. We intend to come down this day week to Corbyn Court, and both sincerely hope that we shall find you there to welcome us. We shall be accompanied by Miss Peyton, Miss Leicester, and Mr. Harbut, who have very gratefully befriended Constance, and their presence will help to smooth away any little stiffness that might otherwise attend our meeting."

There was, however, no stiffness beyond that natural to her, in the manner in which Mrs. Clitheroe received her son and his wife on their arrival at Corbyn Court. She had during the previous week received the warm congratulations of her numerous acquaintances, and had led them to believe, without absolutely saying so, that she had from the first been aware of her brother's marriage, and that everything had turned out precisely as she had anticipated.

"My greatest regret in the affair is that I think it probable that my son will take the name of Corbyn. It is, of course, an older one in the country than our own, but it will nevertheless be a matter of regret to me that the heir to my husband's estates should not bear his name, but perhaps that difficulty may be got over hereafter."

Notwithstanding the manner of their reception, Miss Peyton expressed to her niece her renewed conviction that Mrs. Clitheroe, senior, was a detestable woman ; and when two days later she announced her intention of leaving for Clitheroe, where she had business that rendered her presence necessary, there was a perceptible feeling of relief among the party at Corbyn Court.

It may here be said that although the Dowager Mrs. Clitheroe always publicly expressed herself in terms of strong affection for her daughter-in-law, and of complete satisfaction at the turn events had taken, she spent but a small portion of her time at Corbyn Court, where it must be owned that her society was but little missed, even by

her son. Madame Duport returned to St. Malo. She obstinately refused to accept the income which Philip and Constance pressed upon her.

"We were earning enough to keep us comfortably. As you know, my dear, Victor would feel lost without his teaching, and now that you have gone, I shall want to have lodgers to look after to give me something to do. Victor and I will, as you say, come over once a year, when it is holiday time in the schools and out of the season for visitors, and stay with you for a month, and you know how pleased we shall be if you can run over sometimes and pay us a little visit at St. Malo, but as for taking money from my child, it is not to be thought of."

But when five years later Annette lost her husband, she disposed of her house at St. Malo and came over to live at Corbyn Court, where she was installed as supreme head of the nursery, declining altogether to yield to the earnest entreaty of Constance and Philip that she should take the position of their friend and guest.


"No, my dear," she said, "I shall be much more comfortable in my proper place. When you are quite alone I will often take my breakfast with you, but I do not like your late dinners, with your men behind the chairs. When we are in the nursery you will be my Constance again, but it would be unpleasant for me to be mixing with your grand friends."

It was some little time before Robert Harbut succeeded in convincing solicitors that he was not so young as he looked, but having at length a chance given him, he did so well that he rose in his profession rapidly, and is now a leading member of the Midland Circuit. His marriage with Hilda Leicester came off very shortly after the return to England of Constance and Philip. Mr. and Mrs. Harbut and Miss Peyton, who is now a very old lady, are still

the dearest and closest friends of the Clitheroes, for Philip did not change his name, but it is understood that his eldest boy will upon coming of age add the name of Corbyn to his own.

THE END.


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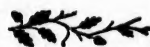
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